

socialist
REVIEW

Cruise Missiles
S.Africa
Russian Strikes
Inquests

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**The
politics
of
sport.**



Gorky and Togliatti strike out



The last few weeks have seen hundreds of thousands of Soviet workers on strike in the largest mass industrial actions since the twenties. On 6 May the 170,000 workers in the Togliatti Auto Works walked out. The brand-new town of Togliattigrad, named after the Italian communist leader, is built around the car factory. Virtually all of its 500,000 inhabitants derive their living from it in one way or another. The plant makes Russia's Fiats, 660,000 of them a year, most of these the Soviet economy model exported as the Lada. The workers came out in solidarity with the town's busmen, on strike against the authorities' attempt to give them extra routes to drive without any extra pay. The strike succeeded after two days.

On 8 and 9 May 200,000 workers at the mammoth car factory in the closed city of Gorky stayed away from work, in protest against the lack of meat and dairy products in the local shops (this was also a secondary issue in the Togliattigrad strike). Unlike most Soviet strikes it was organised and preceded by the distribution of 2,000 handwritten leaflets. It was the largest single walk-out ever reported in the Soviet Union. The strike ended after the arrest of four leading workers.

There are hints that these are not the only disputes in the Soviet car industry in recent months—on the weekend of 14 and 15 June, for example, Central Committee heavyman Kirilenko flew to the giant new Kama River Truck Plant for a series of urgent meetings with management and trade unions.

This is the third and perhaps the most important strike wave in modern Soviet history. The first took place under Krushchev, in 1962, when the doubling of prices for meat and dairy products was greeted with mass protest demonstrations and rioting all over the Soviet Union. The most violent outbreak was in Novocherkassk, in the Donbas region of the Ukraine, where the price rises coincided with a 30% reduction in piecework rates. The government panicked and sent the army in and a workers' demonstration was mowed down with machine guns.

The second series of strikes occurred in the early seventies, at the same time as the workers' demonstrations over food in Poland. The Soviet authorities were so worried by the similarity that they redrafted the 1971-5 five year plan to promise, for the first time ever, faster growth for consumer goods than heavy industry.

Food and Pay

The new strike wave, like the other two, has

been sparked off by attempts to increase production norms (ie to reduce wages) and, above all, by food shortages. Typically, factory workers in Tula in 1977 refused to collect their paychecks for two consecutive months. They told officials 'we do not need the money because there is nothing here to buy'. Brezhnev rushed down to declare Tula a 'hero city' for its role in defeating Germany in the Second World War. Hero cities come into a privileged category and automatically get better food supplies.

In summer 1978 meat disappeared from the normally well-stocked city of Leningrad. Alarming rumours spread that Leningrad had been reduced to the status of a second class city. The workers at the key Kirov factory finally downed tools and announced their refusal to work on a vegetarian diet. Within half an hour a member of the Politburo was on the spot. Three-quarters of an hour later, vans loaded with meat drew up outside the factory gates.

So far the reaction of Brezhnev's government, in contrast to Krushchev's, has been to placate the workers by rushing emergency food supplies to the trouble spots. But how long can it keep it up?

Meat and dairy products have long been scarce in the Soviet Union. But the shortage has been critical since the terrible harvest of 1975. Many small towns have had almost no meat since then. Rationing has been in force in Cheboksary (400 miles east of Moscow), for example, since 1976 or 1977, with a limit of 2.2 pounds per adult per month.

In spite of massive investment in agriculture, the grain harvest of 1979 was another disaster. The Volga valley, east of Moscow, has been hit particularly hard. Meat rationing began in Gorky in April, just before the strike. Rationing is also being introduced in the Urals, where workers are going slow in protest. Even in Moscow, meat and dairy products are vanishing from the shops. The situation shows little prospect of improvement—the urban population is increasing three times faster than food supplies.

In industry as well as agriculture, 1979 was one of the worst years since the Second World War. Soviet industry is paralysed by bureaucratism, inefficiency, corruption and theft. In the Togliattigrad factory, for example, everything that anyone could conceivably carry has to be locked up at night. On 28 November last year Brezhnev came out into the open and admitted all this. But he didn't call for any major reforms of industry, just 'the strengthening of discipline', ie the incessant raising of production norms,

the tightening of the screws on the workers.

Independent organisation

In reaction, for the first time since the twenties, Soviet workers are beginning to feel the need for their own independent organisations. The lack of these has meant that until very recently strikes have been completely spontaneous and very short.

The use of leaflets at Gorky shows that things are beginning to change. Fired by the example of Klebanov's *Free Trade Union*, (almost all the members of which are now in prison or psychiatric hospital), Soviet workers are beginning to demand that trade unions should not be run by the management and party. A group of workers in Togliattigrad Milk Combine have written an *Appeal to Nowhere*:

It is known that there is unemployment in other countries. That is very bad and unfortunate. But there is something else which is many times worse and sadder. This is the situation where we workers are gradually turned into mute, depersonalised beings, living appendages to machines and equipment, robots who are not allowed to have their own opinions. There, far away, in the West we do not know, there are trade unions which are, or are at least capable of being, the spokesmen of their workers. Once the workers have such unions, they are no longer robots! But here?! ... Its not just that we have a bad chairwoman on the Factory Committee and no right to call her to account. The real point is that *any* chairperson of the committee will be chosen by the director and the party bureau ... Our propaganda brazenly ... declares that we, the workers of the USSR, have our own workers' organ—our trade unions. Lies!

To all appearances, the Soviet Union is entering on a new era of industrial conflict.
Claire Herschfeld

Misha and the missiles

The argument over the Cold War is going to be projected into everyone's living rooms in the next couple of weeks. For the Olympics have been used more than ever before to hammer home the ideological messages of rulers East and West.

The Russians, like every previous host country, have seen the Games as a circus to distract attention at home from other issues (like the food shortages and strikes described by Claire Herschfeld opposite) and to boost their own prestige abroad.

What has been unique this time round has been the way Carter has used the call to boycott the Olympics to try to marshal opinion throughout what he sees as the American sphere of influence behind Washington's renewed hostility to Moscow. The clearest evidence of the ideological function of the anti-Olympics campaign has been the complete lack of bite of the trade sanctions that were supposed to accompany it.

The American government did force the cancellation of several major contracts by revoking export licences, but the claim that \$1bn worth of high technology exports were affected is very misleading. This figure has to be spread over more than ten years; in fact, less than 200 million dollars of US exports to Russia last year could be classified as high technology. The ban on these exports doesn't apply to Eastern Europe either, so there are ample opportunities for getting round it.

Meanwhile the grain embargo is farcical. America will sell eight million tonnes of grain to Russia this year—and unusually large quantities of US grain are appearing in Mexico and Venezuela, probably bound for Russia.

Apart from Thatcher, none of the other Western European politicians have been keen on the embargo from the start, especially West Germany, which is very anxious to boost trade with Russia on the eve of the new Five-Year Plan. Among the Western deals signed with Russia since the 'boycott' was announced have been:— West German contracts to build a £5.1 bn. pipeline, to supply 700,000 tonnes of steel pipe, and to develop the Lada car plant; Japanese contracts for 500,000 tonnes of steel pipe and for a textile plant; Italian contracts for £671 of chemical plants; an American contract to supply oil rigs; French contracts to supply pipe manufacturing plant and \$118 m. of oil rigs. If British firms are not on this list, it is not because of political scruple but lack of competitiveness—Whimpey bid for the \$118 m. oil rig contract but failed to get it.

The British trade ban has been described as 'phoney' by the *Sunday Times*. It consist-

ed of 'avoiding high level contact'—but the monthly meetings between the Russian trade delegation and the Department of Trade have continued. The £950m credit deal made by Harold Wilson in 1975 has been scrapped—but it was due to expire anyway, and had long been criticised for being too generous on interest rates. Credit is still being provided on a contract-by-contract basis, and it has been claimed it is still available on highly favourable terms.

The background to the trade 'boycott' is the enormous expansion of East-West trade. There are 1500 agreements on long-term East-West industrial co-operation. Turn-over in trade between Comecon and Western Europe reached £24.1 bn. in 1979. For specific countries the growth has been rapid: French trade with Russia rose 33% last year, and has trebled since 1975. West Germany's exports to Russia rose by 36% in 1979. Loans have reached gigantic proportions.

Behind the fake trade boycott and the hypocritical rhetoric about the Olympics, something much more sinister is at stake. This, as Peter Binns spells out in his article later in this *Review*, is the adoption of weapons programmes which are qualitatively more dangerous even than the horrendous nuclear arsenals we've had to live with for the last 30 years and more.

We are not among those who see the Kremlin's armies as bringing 'progress' to Afghanistan. We view as nonsense any claim that the Russian forces at work in Kabul—let alone in Eritrea or the Ogaden—are playing a purely 'defensive' role. The Russian military machine, like the Western military machines, is designed to ensure that client states and subject peoples bare some of the burden of equipping the dominant ruling class for economic and military competition in the face of a world crisis (with stagnation and recession in the state capitalist East as well as the monopoly capitalist West).

It is the fact of this crisis which drives states East and West to trade more with each other *and* to boost their military preparations in an attempt to get an advantage over each other.

We live in the West. We would welcome it if Russian dissidents succeeded in token disruption of the Olympics and drew attention to their plight. We would love it if strikes by Russian workers brought the whole enterprise to a halt. But for *us* the most important thing has been to resist *our* rulers in their attempts to create a new cold war hysteria to go with the New Cold War. And that has meant opposing the schemes of Carter and Thatcher to wreck the Olympics.

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Union leaders rule, OK?

Readers have probably been bewildered by the conclusions of the Labour Party's Commission of Inquiry into itself. Its findings have been greeted in some quarters as a defeat for the left, in others as a defeat for the right, and different newspapers confidently predict that (depending on their forecasts of where union block votes go) either the left or the right will be able to overturn them at Labour's autumn conference.

Jon Bearman argues that the real victory in the inquiry was neither for the traditional left or the traditional right in the party, but for those, like the leaders of the big unions, who would like to refurbish the image of the party around a new programme of reforms which would leave unhindered their own desires to compromise with the existing set up.

At the last Labour Party conference, the left won two victories — that MPs should be subject to mandatory reselection by constituency labour parties, and that the NEC (elected by the conference and currently inclined to the left) should draw up the election manifesto. But the left's call for the conference, rather than the right-wing inclined parliamentary Labour Party to elect the Party leader, was narrowly defeated.

Now the trade union leaders have used their dominating position in the Commission of Inquiry to get it to recommend (to this autumn's conference) taking the writing of the manifesto out of the hands of the NEC and the election of the party leader away from the untrammelled control of the parliamentary party. Instead, in a clever compromise, a new electoral college will be responsible for both. With 50 per cent of its representatives from the parliamentary party and 25 per cent from the unions (leaving the constituency parties with only 20 per cent) its deliberations are going to depend on compromises between the union bureaucracies and the pre-

dominantly right-wing MPs.

The electoral college could well mean that the commanding positions built up by the left in the NEC could be neatly by-passed, with the college being used as a sort of second conference if the first one took the wrong decisions from the point of view of the parliamentary party and key union leaders.

The left's only hope then would be to try to use reselection in the constituencies to change the stance of the MPs and thus of the college. But this, by its very nature, would be a very long-term operation, a far cry from the promised quick kill against the right with which the left are encouraging new recruits to join the party. Almost certainly those sections of the Labour left, like Peter Hain, who have been talking of decisive conference decisions as a spur to extra-parliamentary work in the constituencies, would have to think again or be left by the way side.

Already the signs are that the left will focus upon a single issue — withdrawal from the Common Market — as the stick with which to beat the right in the constituencies. This they see as appealing to union as well as constituency activists, and even to some sections of the right. It would leave isolated those MPs who defend the EEC as a matter of principle. And it is an issue that is electorally popular.

The hard right (Shirley Williams etc) could certainly be hurt by this. They would quite likely suffer in any electoral college scheme any way, since they are not popular with the union leaders. But the beneficiaries in both cases would not be the lefts. They would be the so-called 'left of centre'. It would be John Silkin or Peter Shore who would gain, rather than Benn.

But this would not represent anything new in the history of the Labour Party. Nearly all the party's leaders started off as the choice of the left and centre left (MacDonald, Lansbury, Attlee, Wilson) before veering off to the right once at the top.

But then this is not the first time that the trade union leaderships have engaged in revitalising reformism within the Labour Party. Ernest Bevin of the TGWU and Walter Citrine of the TUC performed a very similar role in the early 1930s to that played by Evans, Basnett and co today.

What the trade union leaders want out of the current turmoil is the establishment of certain agreed reference points around which a new, safe reformism can emerge. The Alternative Economic Policy adopted by the TUC and many individual unions would provide the core of this. Under its cloak, the union leaders would be able to firm up the discussions already taking place on the TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee to reestablish their central role in implementation of government policy, in return for acquiescence in yet another scheme for a social contract style incomes policy. The fact that the hard right in the parliamentary party have to take a few knocks should not make people forget that the party as a whole is retreading the trail that led to the Wilson and Callaghan governments.

If the Inquiry report is adopted by the party's autumn conference, the eventual result will be further disillusionment for the regulars of the Labour left and for those who have been tempted back into the party in the last few months by the prospect of quick change. Both will find themselves channelling their energies into constituency wrangles and bureaucratic manoeuvres in an effort to influence reselection conferences that might, one day, influence the process by which the parliamentary party selects its delegates to the electoral college.

Past experience suggests that it will not be long before those so enthusiastically moving towards the Labour Party now will be moving away again in disillusionment. The present social composition of Labour Party activists — mainly from white collar jobs and the professions — means that relatively few manual workers will in any case move from passive support for the party to active participation (a notable feature of the large — for the Labour Party — demonstration over cruise missiles was the small number of manual workers on it).

In either case, however, the extent to which people rebound from the Labour Party into a different, revolutionary sort of politics, will depend very much on the ability of socialists now to offer united, anti-Tory activity to those, actively or passively, around the Labour Party — over unemployment and the right to work, over resistance to the Employment Bill, over the cuts, over the cruise missiles and NATO. Unless we can draw them into united activity with us in the period ahead, they can go where so many previous disillusioned Labour generations have gone — nowhere.

Socialist Workers Party

FOR WORKERS
POWER AND
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TRADE UNION

TELEPHONE



The ANC attack on the crucial Sasol oil installations sent shivers down the spine of the white South African establishment.

Storm over the Cape

Four years after the Soweto uprising South Africa seems on the verge of another explosion. At the time of writing (21 June) the police had killed 42 young coloureds in the Cape. Indeed, the regime is being challenged on a much broader front than in 1976 – by industrial workers, school students, clergymen and the guerillas of the African National Congress.

Yet it is the unevenness of the movement that is most striking. Soweto, the vast black city outside Johannesburg that was the heart of the 1976 rising, has remained largely silent. It has been the coloured youth in the Cape who have been making the running.

One can speculate as to the reasons for this. Soweto suffered a terrible bloodletting in 1976, which may have made people more reluctant to take on the regime now. Moreover, many of the surviving young militants left the country after 1976, most of them to undergo military training, and so the political leadership of the movement has been weakened. Finally, the regime has made some effort to improve school conditions in Soweto, although they still remain abysmal.

One of the ironies of the situation is that the prime minister, P.W. Botha, is strongly committed to the improvement of the coloureds' condition. His political base is in the Cape, where most coloureds live. The reputedly 'liberal' Cape Nationalist Party tends to regard them as 'brown Afrikaners', since they share the language, religion, and some of the same ancestors as the dominant

Afrikaner group. The western Cape has been declared a 'coloured preference area', with the aim that it should develop into an autonomous community governed by the coloured middle class.

The other side of the coin to this policy has been an attempt to force Africans out of the western Cape. A ruthless resettlement programme was mounted and it is government policy that preference should be given to coloureds over Africans for jobs and housing.

Botha's policy seems to have failed utterly. The number of Africans employed as short-term contract workers in the Cape area has risen steeply in recent years. Attempts to deport the residents of the illegal African squatters' camp at Crossroads in Cape Town were eventually abandoned and the minister of co-operation and development (the latest name for apartheid), Piet Koornhof, has turned Crossroads into a township and is building permanent homes for the residents.

Nor has divide and rule worked as a policy. In August and September 1976 coloured school students in the Cape joined in the uprising which had begun in Soweto that June. Coloured African unity in the Cape has been developing on an impressive scale in recent years. This is especially so in the workplace, where traditionally coloureds have occupied more skilled and better paid jobs and have been allowed to join trade unions, while Africans have been predominantly unskilled and unorganised contract workers (70 per cent of the

African workers in the western Cape are contract workers).

A recent article in the Johannesburg *Financial Mail* (9 May 1980) reported that 'in the western Cape over the past year, there has been a marked escalation of strikes', mainly by unskilled and contract workers, but involving 'rising solidarity among workers, not only among those working for the same employer but between coloureds and Africans'. In the longest strike in South African history African and coloured workers at Monis & Fattis stayed out for seven months over the dismissal of five coloured workers in a union recognition dispute. Union recognition was also the issue at Kromrivier Apple Co-operative where 700 coloured and African workers went on strike. There have also been walk-outs at a civil engineering site and fish factory in Saldhana bay, at Ceres Fruit Growers Co-op and among the stevedores on the docks.

The meat industry has been particularly affected. Workers went on strike in 11 major meat firms to force the reinstatement of a worker dismissed at Karoo Meat Exchange. In May 18 meat factories went on strike after Table Bay Cold Storage refused to recognise the Western Province General Workers Union. A boycott of red meat was enforced in the Cape townships.

Other issues have been taken up. The resettlement of coloureds from inner-city areas such as District Six to Cape Flats – a row of sand-dunes stretching for 10 to 15 miles outside the city – means that transport to and from work

costs R1 or more a day. Fare increases in June led to a bus boycott. Then three quarters of the Cape Town workforce went on strike on 16 June in memory of the Soweto uprising.

So the coloured students when they launched their boycott in April were part of a community seething with anger. Their demands are specific, ranging from the repair of schools damaged in the 1976 disturbances to the recognition of their right to elect student representative councils. Their organisation seems to have been stronger and better co-ordinated than was true of the Soweto students. And there are indications that revolutionary socialist ideas have been influential among some of them – indeed there is a tradition of Trotskyism among coloureds in the Cape which dates back to the 1930s and 1940s. A businessman told the *Financial Times*: 'The students are arguing in terms of the class struggles not the vague thoughts of black consciousness.'

Both sides had been careful to avoid a repetition of the 1976 bloodbath. Botha met coloured leaders and admitted that some of the students' grievances were justified. The Committee of 81 organising the boycott avoided head-on confrontation with the police, who kept their guns in their holsters.

This changed in the week beginning 16 June. Exactly why it did so is difficult to say at this stage – perhaps, as in Soweto, the 'push-outs', young unemployed with little prospect of ever getting a job, snatched the leadership from the Committee of 81. The death of a white policeman on Monday evening may have decided the authorities to take the gloves off.

As we have seen, so far Soweto has remained quiet. There have been echoes among African school students elsewhere in the country – in Natal, where the Zulu tribal leader, Gatsha Buthelezi, rushed to oppose the boycotts, in Port Elizabeth, where an adult strike-breaker was stoned to death by students, and in Bloemfontein's Batho township, in the heart of Afrikanerdom.

Black militancy is not confined to the western Cape. Volkswagen workers at Uitenhage in the eastern Cape are on strike, partly to protest against the government ban on public meetings. The strike has spread to embrace 7,500 workers in 11 plants. Goodyear has sacked over 1,000 of its employees.

The Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage area, the fourth largest manufacturing concentration in South Africa and the centre of the car industry, was shaken six months ago by a prolonged strike at the Ford Cortina plant over the sacking of a black activist, Thozamile Botha. The Cortina plant was closed last week, a components shortage caused by the strikes – components were being flown in from Britain to start production again. The car bosses must be wringing their hands – 1980 was expected to be a record year for car sales.

So it is not only the unskilled contract workers, but the most highly skilled and best paid sections of the

black proletariat, whom Botha's labour reforms were intended to conciliate, who are involved in the present strike wave. In Durban there has been a bitter strike in the Frame group of textile factories. The 1973 mass strikes began at Frame. The black workers' movement is now at a higher pitch than at any time since 1973.

The guerillas

Finally, the spectacular sabotage on 2 June of Sasol installations near Johannesburg underlined that the armed struggle is now being carried on within South Africa's borders. A briefing document prepared by the Anti-Apartheid Movement, *The Battle for South Africa*, details the escalation of armed incidents between the guerillas and the security forces since Soweto. It is clear that the African National Congress is mounting a major armed campaign. Some of the incidents in the past few months – the bank siege at Silverton, an attack on Booyens police station in Johannesburg and the Sasol bombing, all carried out by the ANC, show that the current offensive is much more professional and effective than the disastrous Umkonto weSizwe sabotage campaign of the early 1960s. The Sasol incident in particular sent a wave of fear running through the South African establishment, since the state corporation's coal-into-oil project is central to the regime's drive to self-sufficiency.

Paradoxically, although the ANC played a relatively minor role in 1976, it has been the main political beneficiary of Soweto. Most of the black militants who then fled into exile joined the ANC. They did so partly because they were under pressure to do so from the front line states, partly because ANC has an armed wing, and partly because its programme contains a coherent strategy which the black consciousness movement, whose activists largely led the rising, lacked.

ANC seems to have moved its headquarters to Mozambique, and also has an operation in Swaziland (where ANC houses were bombed after Sasol – presumably Pretoria's revenge). There has been a steady infiltration of guerillas into the country, with many armed clashes in border areas between them and the security forces. In February the army took over responsibility for northern Natal, and the regime has on a number of occasions threatened retaliation against the Mozambican government. Parts of rural Natal and the Transvaal are beginning to look like rural Zimbabwe during the war of liberation.

All this comes at a time when the regime is in any case under heavy military pressure in Namibia, where the war in the northern parts of the country with the South-West Africa People's Organisation is becoming increasingly serious.

The danger is, however, that the logic of guerilla warfare is quite different from that of mass struggle. Popular support is essential to the success of a guerilla army, but so also are secrecy,

discipline and mobility, qualities which separate the fighter from the masses.

Moreover, the social structure of the South African countryside is quite different from that of Mozambique or even Zimbabwe – the peasantry has been largely proletarianised, and it is the unemployed and the dependants of wage-earners in white areas who make up the bulk of the population of the Bantustans. Guerilla tactics make much less sense in an urban environment; there are so many cases where they have failed – Brazil, Uruguay, Algeria – that it is difficult to see why they should succeed against a regime whose security forces cut their teeth during the last such campaign, in the early 1960s.

The tragedy of South Africa today is that we are now in the third wave of mass struggles to have shaken the country in the last ten years. In each case the wave was localised – in 1972-73 to the Durban area, in 1976 to Soweto and, to a less extent, the Cape, today largely to the Cape. This gives the regime the great advantage that it can concentrate its repressive forces in the trouble-spots, without having to worry too much about the rest of the country. Thus the vast industrial area around Durban remained silent in 1976.

The unevenness of the movement brings out very sharply the absence of any national political organisation capable of co-ordinating struggles in the different localities. ANC's military strategy means that it must concentrate the bulk of its resources on organising and servicing the guerillas, to the detriment of the mass movement. Moreover, because of its advocacy of an all-class alliance against apartheid, it tends to downgrade the significance of the black working class, and to demand of workers simply that they support the armed struggle. In Zimbabwe this strategy led to the betrayal of the masses' aspirations after victory; in South Africa it is likely to lead to defeat.

Alex Callinicos

Bolivia

As we go to press an election is due to take place in Bolivia. Pedro Hurtado, a Bolivian tin miner, explains the background.

The elections on 29 June will be the third in three years. In 1978 a hunger strike by wives of imprisoned miners saw the first cracks in the seven year military dictatorship of General Banzer. With massive popular support, they won an amnesty for political prisoners and the promise of free elections in July 1978.

But Banzer, forced to back down and concede elections, organised hard to win the election. Organising meant a campaign of systematic fraud in favour of the official candidate, General Juan Pereda Asbur. The aim was to ensure a democratic facade behind which the same old gang of local and foreign capitalists could continue their reign of exploitation, terror and repression.

Cruising towards disaster

The plan went astray. The left-wing front, the Democratic and Popular Union (UDP), gained 34 per cent of the vote. A wave of protest, at home and abroad, forced the electoral court to annul the fraudulent result favouring Pereda and order another election for the following year.

The strength of popular feeling shook the ruling class and, with the support of a section of the army and the mineowners, General Pereda deposed Banzer and took power himself on 21 July. But he too, was unable to hold on to power and was thrown out in November by another military Junta.

They managed to organise a relatively fair election in July 1979 in which the UDP won 36 per cent of the vote. This was not enough to form a government under the gerrymandered constitution but it was enough to drive the right into a fury. The compromise provisional government, whose job was to organise yet another election, narrowly survived an attempted coup in November 1979. This coup was particularly brutal, murdering and imprisoning all those it could get its hands on. But it was met with heroic resistance from the masses, led by the main trade union organisation, the Central Obrera Boliviana.

The people took to the streets and more than 600 died in pitched battles against the reactionaries. The leaders of the coup were even abandoned by Carter and, isolated at home and abroad, were unable to hold on to power. They were replaced by a new provisional government and the masses had forced open the road to this year's election.

Once again, the main force on the left will be the UDP. This is made up of a number of long-established parties, including the Bolivian Communist Party, the Revolutionary Workers' Party (Posadas), the Left National Revolutionary Movement and the Left National Revolutionary Party. It also contains a relatively new force, the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MJR), which developed in the resistance against the Banzer dictatorship and played a big role in the 1976 national miners' strike.

The run-up to the elections has been bloody. The military are waiting in the wings ready to try a new coup if it looks as though they can get away with it. But short of that, they are organising death squads with the active involvement of many army officers. One of their first victims was a Jesuit priest, Father Luis Espinal, who had fought alongside the workers in many struggles. They have now shifted their attention to the leaders of the UDP. Their most recent effort was the sabotage of an aircraft carrying members of the UDP. Two deputies were killed, two wounded, and the vice-presidential candidate, Jaime Paz of the MIR, suffered serious burns.

Despite the terror, the campaign goes on. The right has set its face against any government which tries to meet the aspirations of the masses. For their part, the masses are equally determined that the rule of the *gorillas* and their capitalist backers must end. Whatever the outcome of the elections, there will be new and massive struggles in Bolivia.

With the cruise missile demonstration last month, nuclear disarmament has reemerged as a political issue. It would be easy to dismiss it as shadow boxing between the Right and the Bennites in the Labour Party. Easy—but a mistake. For what is involved is of fundamental significance in the struggle for socialism. The fight against cruise missiles is the fight against the incorporation of workers into the interests of 'their' bosses and 'their' state.

And it takes place at a crucial moment in the world arms race. The dangers of accidentally triggering a nuclear Armageddon have risen sharply—partly due to the effects of the crisis in intensifying competition between the USA and the USSR (a point to which we shall return later), and partly to the sheer number of the triggers.

The world system is much more accident-prone in three main ways. For a start there is a huge (and rapidly increasing) number of nuclear warheads. The scale of it all is quite horrendous: the Hiroshima bomb in 1945 killed 140,000 people (and left countless other in indescribable agony); today the world's leaders have the bombs to create not just ten, a hundred or a thousand Hiroshimas, but *more than a million* of them.

Then there is what the experts politely refer to as 'lateral proliferation': at least Leonid and Jimmy have their hot line and a common interest in the preservation of a world in which they are top dogs. Can it plausibly be maintained that the same is true for PW Botha in his bunker in Pretoria, for Zia and Ghandi, and for the ex-Irgun terrorist Begin in Israel? What is more, the extension of 'peaceful' nuclear power generation to more and more countries—the avowed policy of Carter, Thatcher and Giscard—ensures that a good number of them will make the comparatively simple step of conversion to military purposes in the present atmosphere of heightened world tension.

Thirdly, there are the new weapons systems themselves. A barrage of propaganda from the British and American governments on the supposed expansion of chemical, biological and genetic weapons by the USSR (propaganda which has no basis in fact, according to neutral experts at Sussex University and elsewhere) is being used to cover

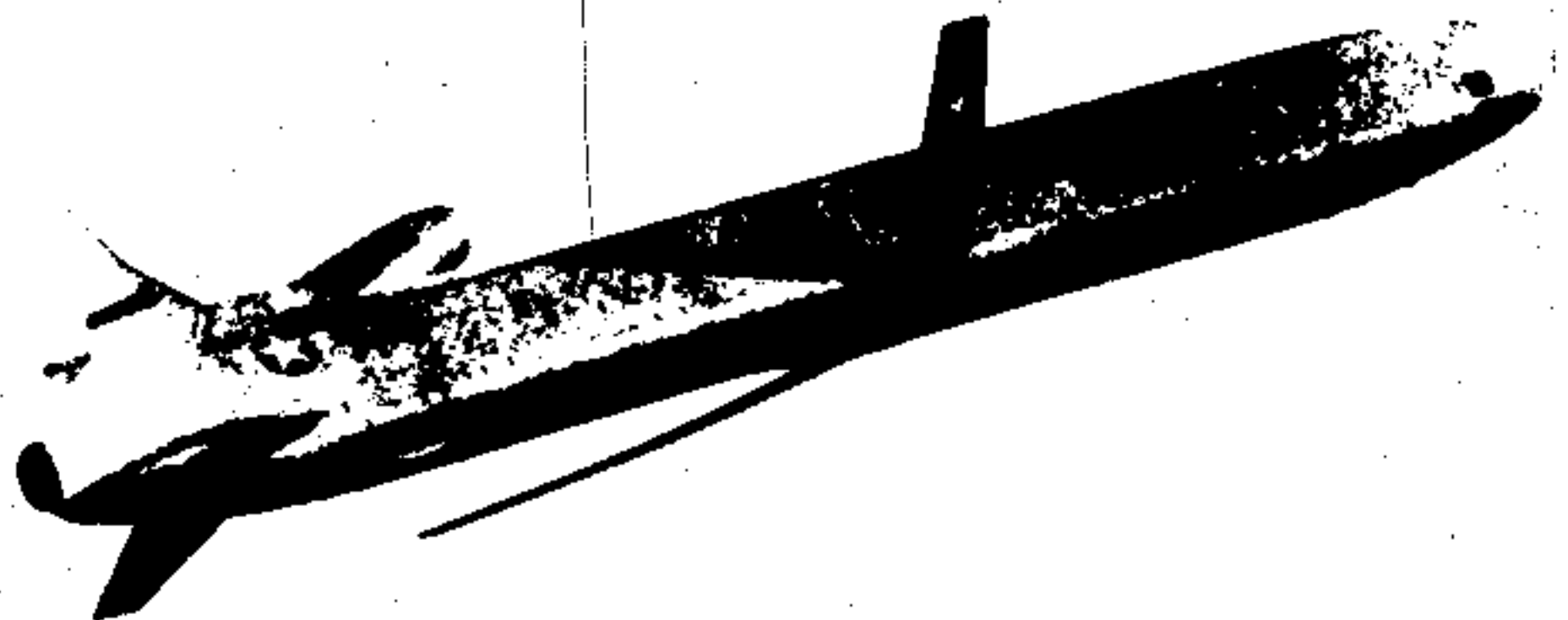
up a return to them by the West. The defence secretary, Francis Pym, has already threatened as much.

Hand in hand with this is the new generation of nukes. The US government threw out the agreement with the USSR over strategic arms limitations (SALT 2), and in the last year it has begun to develop and produce a whole new generation of weapons. First of all there is the B1 strategic bomber—shelved during the '70s 'detente' period. Then there is the M-X mobile missile which will eat up 100 billion dollars of the one *trillion* (that's right — \$1,000,000,000,000, a million million dollars) 1981-85 weapons programme. 200 MXs are due to go into service, permanently trundling through America's mountain states.

Then there is the neutron bomb (in the official jargon an 'enhanced radiation device'), which kills people but leaves property intact. Although Carter has made a commitment not to deploy it, in practice this means nothing. For in October 1978 the USA began to 'modernise' the warheads on its Lance surface-to-surface missiles and the 8 inch howitzer shell, so that they could be fitted with the neutron bomb 'should it be necessary'! And at the same time Carter authorised a bill sanctioning the production of everything needed to make the bomb. So all Carter's commitment amounts to is one of not actually leaving the troops stationed in Germany with live warheads—for the moment.

Finally there is the cruise missile itself. Highly accurate and flying beneath the level of radar, it represents an important escalation of the arms race. 200 of these dangerous toys are to be based at Molesworth in Berkshire and Greenham Common in Cambridgeshire. Mounted on mobile launchers, the theory is that in times of emergency they will scatter to the remoter parts of our shores and from there fire their lethal load at targets in Eastern Europe.

In an attempt to downplay the significance of the cruise missile, Francis Pym has referred to them simply as replacements to the ageing Vulcan bombers. This is nonsense. American F-111s and Tornados have already been ordered to replace the Vulcan.



Are they now to be cancelled? Not at all, they will simply be freed for other targets and other weapons systems.

This escalation takes place in the context of continuing Western superiority in strategic weapons. This is *universally* admitted to be the case. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute has, for instance, estimated the number of strategic bombs and missiles to be about the same in the USA and the USSR. But the American weapons are not only in all probability much more accurate, but they contain many missiles with multiple, independently targeted warheads (MIRVs). Taking this into account, the USA comes out with more than twice as many weapons as the USSR (8,870 to 3,810). Another central plank of the Tories' missile policy is the claim that the cruise missile is safer than existing bombers because it will deter the Russians more effectively. In a recent phone-in programme Pym claimed that 'because (cruise missiles) would be scattered it would be an impossible task in the foreseeable future for the Russians to knock them out. This is part of the merit of these particular weapons'.

Now it is not clear whether it is Pym's intention to deceive here, or whether he is just too dull-witted to understand the nature of the context in which the cruise missile might be employed (as the *Economist*, for instance, suggested). But at all events Pym's mentality is fixed in the groove of the 1950s, the B52 bomber, the US Strategic Air Command, Dr Strangelove and so on. The name of the game is not deterrence any more; it is limited posture, a variety of distinct theatres of war (sub-continental, continental, but not inter continental) and so on.

The very proliferation and variety of nuclear weapons has broken the qualitative gap between them and conventional weapons. They are no longer the unthinkable weapons of last resort, but an intrinsic part of the armouries of both sides. NATO has admitted that it would feel free to use them even in a purely tactical manner should there be a significant military conflict in central Europe. NATO's military strategists therefore do not intend to hold back the nukes for deterrence in the event of a limited conflict—they intend to use them.

Now of course they also believe—with an insane logic—that such a 'limited' conflict can be contained, (This view, incidentally, has been repudiated by Lord Zuckerman, chief scientific adviser to the UK government from 1964-71 in a recent letter to *The Times*: 'Nor was I ever able to see any military reality in what is now referred to as theatre or tactical warfare'.) But whether they are right or wrong, the fact remains that it is theatre wars and not the balance of terror that provides the premise for state-gists in Washington and Moscow in the 1980s.

It is within this context that we have to understand cruise missiles. They are not and cannot be part of any 'balance of terror' strategy. For that, one would not need pinpoint accuracy and warheads limited to the 1½ megaton cruise missile limit. Instead one

would threaten national extinction with a few giant bombs (20+ megatons) distributed for maximum blast and firestorm, but with no particular accuracy.

No, the cruise missile has one purpose and one only: to take out Russia's principle military targets in particular its missile silos of course. Now if so, it is only of use as a *first strike* weapon—it assumes, that is, that the missiles are still there in their silos to be attacked. Far from deterring Russia from striking first (as has been claimed for a more genuine second strike weapon like the submarine-based strategic missile), it positively encourages Russia to loose off its missiles before they are destroyed in the ground. As for Pym's claim that the cruise missiles would be so scattered that it would be impossible for the Russians to knock them out, there is an obvious and horrific answer—bomb this whole bloody island.

Now according to the latest clutch of strategists at the Pentagon this would *not* be Armageddon. In fact they believe it could mean victory. For *if* the weapons can be confined to the range of the medium range cruise missiles and the Russian SS-20, then what survives is Russia east of the Urals and...the whole of the USA. A heavy price to pay perhaps, but the Pentagon seems more and more inclined to pay it.

That such lunacy is considered seriously by our rulers, when to an earlier generation it would have been unthinkable, is not due to Carter being psychologically more of a warmonger than Eisenhower or anything like that. In part no doubt there is a temporary element to it; Carter is up for re-election this year and there is a power struggle in the Kremlin to follow the ailing Brezhnev.

But there is much more to it than that. As the system is reentering a period of crisis, similar in some ways to the pre-1914 period, so too does the competition between the various capitalisms become more and more intense. The various states, as the owners and custodians of national capital, enter battle with each other with whatever weapons are at hand. In a period of generalised expansion there was room for everyone to grow, even if some grew faster than others. Now that is no longer true and yesterday's 'unthinkables' have become today's military strategies.

The 'appeal to reason', issued by the historian Edward Thompson and the other founders of the new European Nuclear Disarmament Campaign, will not of course change this unreason which is endemic to the world capitalist system—East and West. But the fact that the Labour Party and others are prepared to be involved in some *action* on the question is crucial. Revolutionaries should seize the opportunities for genuine united front work on this issue with both hands. Unlike many other issues (like the ANL or fighting the right in the AUEW) it raises the question of how we conceive of society as a whole. It allows us—indeed compels us—to present a different, a *socialist* alternative to capitalism—East and West—and the wars which are endemic to it.

Peter Binns

Picture: John Sturrock (Report)

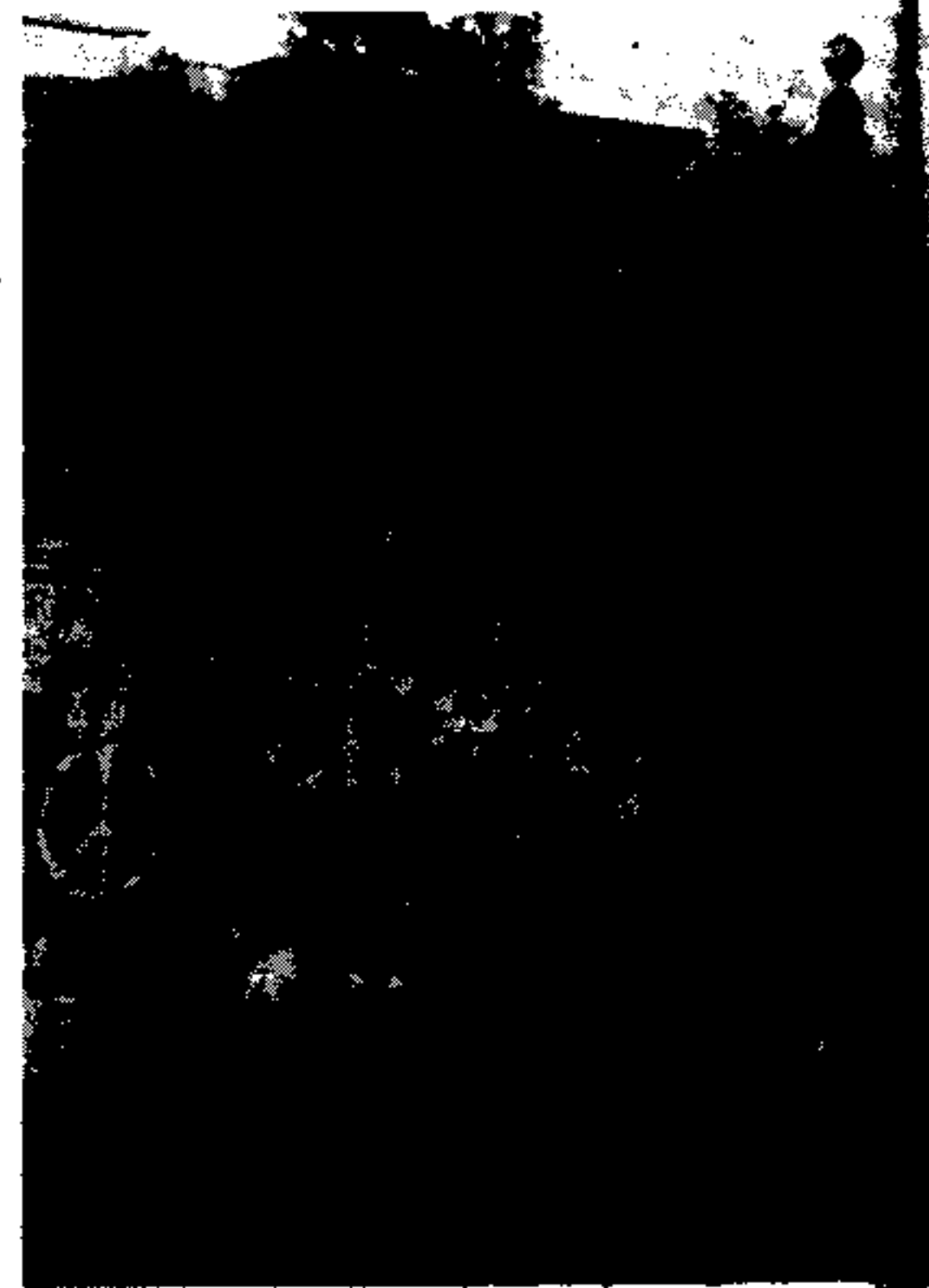


June 22nd: 1960

The politics of resistance

From roughly 1959 until 1962 the campaign against nuclear weapons was *the* big issue in left wing politics. It was a campaign which could draw a hundred thousand people onto the streets. It drew into politics for the first time probably even more than actually marched. For a few months it seemed likely to crack open a large part of the political establishment when, in autumn 1960, the unilateralists carried the Labour Party conference. And, for some months longer it drew tens of thousands of people into direct action, mass confrontation with the police.

But it was an issue whose star fell almost as rapidly as it rose. In 1961, thanks to some compromising by the Labour left and some efficient behind-the-scenes fixing by the



Labour right, the unilateralists decisively lost the Labor Party conference, and were never to fight seriously in that arena again. And if the movement continued in the streets with heightened militancy for a little longer, its mass appeal evaporated after the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. How could you maintain the moral fervour when we had been actually taken to the brink and then led back into the apparently increasingly safe territory of detente?

After that nuclear weapons were just an issue for the left. The Easter marches continued but they were increasingly a ritual. There was a Labour government to get elected after thirteen years of Tory misrule (with the supposedly 'left wing' Harold Wilson to lead it rather than the appalling Hugh Gaitskell). And there was the heroic struggle of the NLF in Vietnam to capture the imagination of the new militants.

By 1968 even the ritual ceased to have any importance. The CND Easter march of that year was swelled by a new and more militant element. But what they were militant about was not the bomb but the attempted murder of student leader Rudi Dutschke and the riots it had prompted throughout Germany. They took a large and lively part of the march off to the West German embassy and the Daily Mirror building. With them they took away the campaign against nuclear weapons even as just one issue among many. Six or seven years after its sickness had set in CND was finally dead. A month later came the May events in France. The prospect of nuclear holocaust had disappeared from the agitational concerns of the left.

Suddenly twelve years later it has reappeared. Whatever the reasons—and there is probably a lot more to it than the new threat specifically posed by the cruise missiles—it is a reappearance that must be wholeheartedly welcomed. Capitalism's ever present threat to blow humanity off the earth is

not something that should be relegated to just another illustration that the ultimate alternative is socialism or barbarism. It should be out on the streets.

On June 22nd it came out. And all credit to those, from the historian EP Thompson to some of the NEC of the Labour Party who got it there. The question now is can it stay there, can it regain some of the strengths of the massive anti bomb movement of the early sixties and can it overcome some of that movement's weaknesses?

Problems

To begin to answer those questions we can do no better than to start with someone else who is asking them: William Rodgers, the Labour Party's defence spokesman. William Rodgers, after all, knows some of the last movement's weaknesses from practical experience. He made his political reputation running the curiously named 'Campaign for Democratic Socialism' which in 1960/61 effectively carved up the unilateralists in the unions and reversed the unilateralist vote at the Labour Party conference.

Today he is screaming about 'creeping neutralism' in the Labour Party and demanded that Michael Foot do his establishment duty at the June 22 rally, denounce unilateralism and affirm Labour's commitment to NATO. Michael Foot was too canny for that. Because, of course, if he had done so he would have got howled down by even a rain soaked crowd.

Which all tends to make William Rodgers look rather silly. He is not. And his arguments, directly or indirectly, are going to have a lot of effect on the anti-cruise campaign. His argument goes basically like this:

'To remain part of the political establishment the Labour Party must support NATO. Whatever technical objections one has to this or that nuclear weapon, to make much of a fuss about it inevitably puts in question all nuclear weapons; in other words it convinces people into being unilateralists. And you cannot be a unilateralist and support NATO, an alliance which relies upon nuclear weapons.'

The political logic is impeccable. And the conclusion socialists must draw from it is that the demand for Britain to leave NATO has to be thrust to the front of the anti-cruise campaign.

It is not, however a conclusion which the majority of the leaders of the Labour left will want to draw into the open.

Instead they will try and fudge the issue. Like Michael Foot did at the rally. And likewise the resolution 'Jobs, Freedom and Peace' passed almost unanimously by the Labour Party special conference does.

One reason for the fudging is that some of them genuinely don't see the logic. But a more powerful reason can be found in the rider that William Rodgers, could well make to his argument:

'Being part of NATO is not just being a party to any old defence agreement. It's maintaining a commitment to 'the Free World', the democratic way of life and the political consensus, and any move away from it will be hammered by the Tories and

the whole of the national press. That will alienate many 'ordinary Labour voters' and will lose us the next election.'

He might also add 'and if that isn't enough I, William Rodgers and many of my friends will help in the process.'

But he will probably not need to do too much of that because this argument is one that carries real weight with most of the leaders of the Labour Left. And one before which they will probably fairly soon retreat. So far they have conducted a useful operation (not only for the movement but for themselves) while only facing warning shots from the Labour right and the Tory press. To go much further will mean that the issues can no longer be fudged. It is not a fight they have the stomach for.

So the Labour Party is unlikely to continue the initiative it began on June 22nd. There are others, however, who will, and who may, as a by-product force the Labour lefts back into the fray.

The people who will continue the campaign are by and large those for whom the *realpolitik* that frightens the Labour left cuts no ice. It cuts no ice because for them cruise missiles are *the* issue against which all others pale into insignificance. E.P. Thompson refusing to write or speak about the subject, history, he loves so much while the nuclear menace looms epitomises this attitude.

It is an attitude with enormous strengths and, initially, it is how many people there are with Thompson's attitude, that will determine whether the anti-cruise campaign takes off. This after all was the attitude which fuelled CND around 1960.

But to say that is to point to a weakness in the attitude. A large (although probably mainly middle class) movement can, and was, built upon that basis. But it will not mobilise sufficient forces to attain its goal unless it is willing to draw in those who are brought into political activity by far more mundane matters, like cuts, like wages, like unemployment. And when the first faltering occurs then that idealism can evaporate turn to some other issue or turn back to the *realpolitik* from which it was initially so hostile.

That is after all exactly what happened to the huge CND movement after 1962. The idealists forgot (or put into cold storage) their ideals, turned them to the Vietnam war or threw their weight into the lesser evil of electing a Labour government.

It need not happen again. But that requires more than redoubling the idealism. It means building the anti-cruise movement as part of the fight against the Tories alongside the battles over cuts, wages, unemployment and racism. It means confronting the arguments about NATO and so on, not with a single moral imperative, but with a hard headed revolutionary world view on everything from the capitalist crisis to the class nature of Russia.

And that is not going to happen unless SWP members and supporters avoid the temptation to sit back and say 'We've seen it all before' but get stuck into building the movement.

Pete Goodwin



"The Express has the spirit and vocabulary of the lout. Victor Matthews is clearly a fitting person to be at its helm."

A foul and slimy dish

A friend who used to work for the *Daily Express* once quoted to me a French philosopher who had declared that to face each day with equanimity one should devour a live toad every morning. The sage clearly has many devotees, for there are no fewer than two-and-a-quarter million people whose appetite for a foul and slimy dish each morning is such that they buy and read the *Daily Express*.

There is nothing quite like the *Express*. Other newspapers may be awful in their way, but none pander to the basest instincts in people with the same unerring, maggotty persistence as the *Express*. The Beaverbrook tradition—chauvinistic pride, rampant racism, sexist trivia, smear politics, adulation of royalty and union bashing—survives as crudely as ever under the new proprietorship of the property, civil engineering, shipping and hotel conglomerate Trafalgar House and the guiding influence of deputy chairman, Victor Matthews.

The *Express* has the spirit and vocabulary of the lout. Matthews is clearly a fitting man to be at its helm. Even as I write the news has just been announced that he has been made a Peer and he will doubtless sit comfortably alongside men of such stature as Lord Shawcross, Lord Robens, Lord George Brown and Lord Goodman.

Though, to give him his due, Lord Matthews—or will he call himself Lord Trafalgar?—does practice what he preaches. As a prominent member of the anti-union Economic League, with a seat on its council, he is as eager as any of his colleagues to throw his wealth and industrial weight against any move by organised workers to better their lot. He is particularly keen on playing on a good wicket, though he has a marked propensity to be stumped at the vital moment.

His favourite ground is the High Court and his fondness for litigation against unions often takes him there. Most recently Matthews, who has found the unions too strong for him on their own pitch, launched

proceedings against myself and the general secretaries of four print unions—SOGAT, NGA, NATSOPA and NUJ—to secure an injunction to prevent us encouraging our members working for *Express* newspapers to strike in support of the TUC Day of Action on May 14.

After the judge had duly complied we all gathered in a jury room to discuss the situation with our lawyers. The discussion opened with one of the print union leaders declaring: "Well, if there's one bleeding paper that won't come out on the 14th it's the *Daily Express*. They made certain of that today." The deliverance was even better than that. We were spared the *Daily Express* for two days, thanks to SOGAT outrage at management's attempts to get out a scab paper.

The Day of Action was, according to the *Express*, a flop. Maybe it was. But who needs success when a flop can deliver us from the *Express* for two days?

The High Court action came as no surprise. As early as mid-April the *Express*, with that brand of political illiteracy that is its hallmark, produced a front-page distribe against the Day of Action. Alongside a caricature of a morose Len Murray a headline screamed DAY OF SHAME and a smaller headline referred to LENIN MURRAY AND HIS TUC BULLY-BOYS. The text even spoke of "a tightly knit group of politically motivated men" and went on to hope piously that it would not be left to Express Newspapers to take the appropriate legal steps to halt the unions. The attack, which covered the entire front page, was not without its unconscious humour. In case readers were in any doubt it bore the label OPINION.

When Trafalgar acquired the Beaverbrook newspapers just three years ago it trumpeted the news on the front page of the July 1, 1977 issue under the uninspired headline YOUR EXPRESS: A NEW HORIZON and alongside a picture of a shifty-eyed, grinning Matthews. He made it clear

then, and has repeated it several times since, that he is in newspapers for profits.

Press profits requiresound circulations and it is clear that Matthews lacks the alchemy of Beaverbrook, who, whatever else may be said of him, managed to turn the basest editorial dross into circulation gold. In short, Matthews is a flop. In three years, despite an easy ride with the unions, he has failed to send the *Express* circulation soaring.

He has also failed to launch the new Sunday paper and the new London evening, both of which formed part of his well publicised plans in the heady days when he first found himself in charge of the fading Beaverbrook "empire". The weird world of the newspaper industry does not respond to the same treatment which he used to build his fortune in property, shipping, etc.

His only hope of securing the kind of profits he is seeking, given his inability to move the *Daily Express* up the circulation charts, is to cut jobs. In this he faces the hated union power of Fleet Street. When he secured his injunction against the Day of Action the paper gloated YOU ARE FREE TO WORK. The notion of the *Daily Express* under Matthews upholding the right to work is an irony to savour at the right time.

The *Daily Express*, like the rest of Fleet Street, is very keen on other freedoms, particularly the freedom of the press. Matthews stated shortly after the takeover:

"By and large the editors will have complete freedom as long as they agree with the policy I have laid down. This is: Believe in Britain and look for the good things."

On terms like that nobody is going to let their editorial freedom run away with them. However, the editor has all the freedom he needs to attack the unions in every initiative they may take to protect their members' jobs, living standards, safety or hard-won legal rights. After all, that is believing in Britain, if not in the British worker. It is certainly, by Fleet Street tradition, one of the "good things."

The pity of it is, of course, that journalists will write such unmitigated crap, turning their backs on the honourable origins of their trade, and that printers will print it. We must look forward to the day when they are prepared to take action to stop the *Express* for two days, not simply because it is a scab paper seeking to evade a TUC Day of Action, but because its contents are a monstrous libel against the very people who unwittingly soak up its daily poison.

I'm not given to quoting with approval the Duke of Edinburgh, but he was certainly on the mark when he described the *Express* as "a bloody awful newspaper." Even he is right sometimes. Maybe, one day, the *Daily Express* will get something right. But don't hold your breath.

Ron Knowles

Ron Knowles is editor of the National Union of Journalists paper, the *Journalist*. He is the only union journal editor to be subject to periodic re-election (every three years) from conference.

Confessions of an 'Economist'

'We have to react to the crisis at a number of levels; first of all we have to resist the attempt to load it on the workers' shoulders. Workers must defend their standard of living to strengthen their confidence, their morale, their organization, their social consciousness. Secondly, we have to emphasise in argument and propaganda that the crisis flows from the logic of capitalism itself. And thirdly, we must make it absolutely clear there is an alternative to capitalism, the socialist planned economy...' (T. Cliff, 1975)

'The trouble with the SWP is that they are economic and workerist and only interested in wages.' (Any member of the IMG/WRP/WSL/etc. in the past ten years)

Well, how do we get the balance right? How in practice on the shop floor *do* we generalise our politics from the myriad of everyday niggling complaints which as shop stewards and militants we have to deal with? How *do* we bring 'politics' into the workplace?

First, let me say that since the election of the Thatcher government it has become immeasurably easier to do so. Second, we must continuously make the point to our fellow workers that politics has always been there.

To give a small example: two years ago, at the tail end of the Social Contract, we issued a leaflet on rail shopmen's wages. In this same leaflet there was an article on the Anti Nazi League and racism. Next day several workers approached myself and Roger Cox, expressing agreement with the main article, but reservations about us raising 'politics', ie the ANL. We discussed the matter between ourselves and then issued another, much harder, bulletin, explicitly linking the question of workshop unity to the need to fight racist ideas in the workshop and the struggle for a higher basic rate.

This, coupled with ANL leaflets and coming down hard on anyone who would

make a racist comment in the canteen or anywhere else, strengthened our hand when it came to what could be crudely called 'trade union issues'. We have now reached the stage, where, although racism does exist, it has largely been relegated to the shithouse wall. A recent shop decision declaring open season on anyone putting up fascist stickers has undoubtedly helped: one local ex-Nazi now falls over himself to offer racing tips to blacks and has recently been seen sporting an anti-nuclear badge.

Since the election of the Tory government we have found our workmates much more susceptible to broader political ideas. Let's look at May 14 and the way it was approached by the different groups in our depot. In the period after the TUC had decided on the Day of Action the NUR at national level did respond well in terms of constant propaganda for a stoppage. The fatal weakness was, of course, the refusal to call it an 'official strike'! This led to enormous confusion and provided the get out for the Tories and moneygrubbers among the workforce. Still the NUR branch endorsed the action and called for a stoppage. We insisted that shift meetings be held, and in a shop committee leaflet argued the case for a political strike against the government. The meetings were stormy but we won a majority for strike action. On the day many of those who voted against going out crossed the picket line. We still have a split shop, but the split is now over class issues, not 'race'. Those who supported the action are more self-confident than ever and we actually picked up our first SWP recruit in years and increased our SW sales.

In contrast the ASLEF branch on the depot (which is dominated by CP broad left) suffered a humiliating defeat when the majority of their members turned in for work. They had not taken the matter to shift meetings, on the grounds that was a danger of a members' meeting overturning the branch decision. They hid their collective heads in the sand on the basis of minority decision and gained nothing from the

day of action. The best resolution in the world means damn all if everyone ignores it.

Obviously such clear cut political issues aren't always possible. But the long process of building up people's confidence in you on the 'bread and butter' issues must be gone, through before you successfully can raise the high level of political generalisation demanded by actions like May 14. Only a trade unionist prepared to take up every grievance however minor will be able to develop the political tolerance from the members to be able to advance socialist ideas without being dismissed as an eccentric.

Another extremely important point is never to hide your politics. Nothing is more difficult than suddenly to move from being a good trade union militant to being an open revolutionary socialist. To suddenly emerge one day from a telephone kiosk wearing a red superman outfit only makes workers wary and open to reactionary propaganda about red plants, infiltrators etc. Of course, in some workshops it may be necessary to keep your head down for a few months, but you should always quietly make your politics known to your mates and any other lefties who may be around.

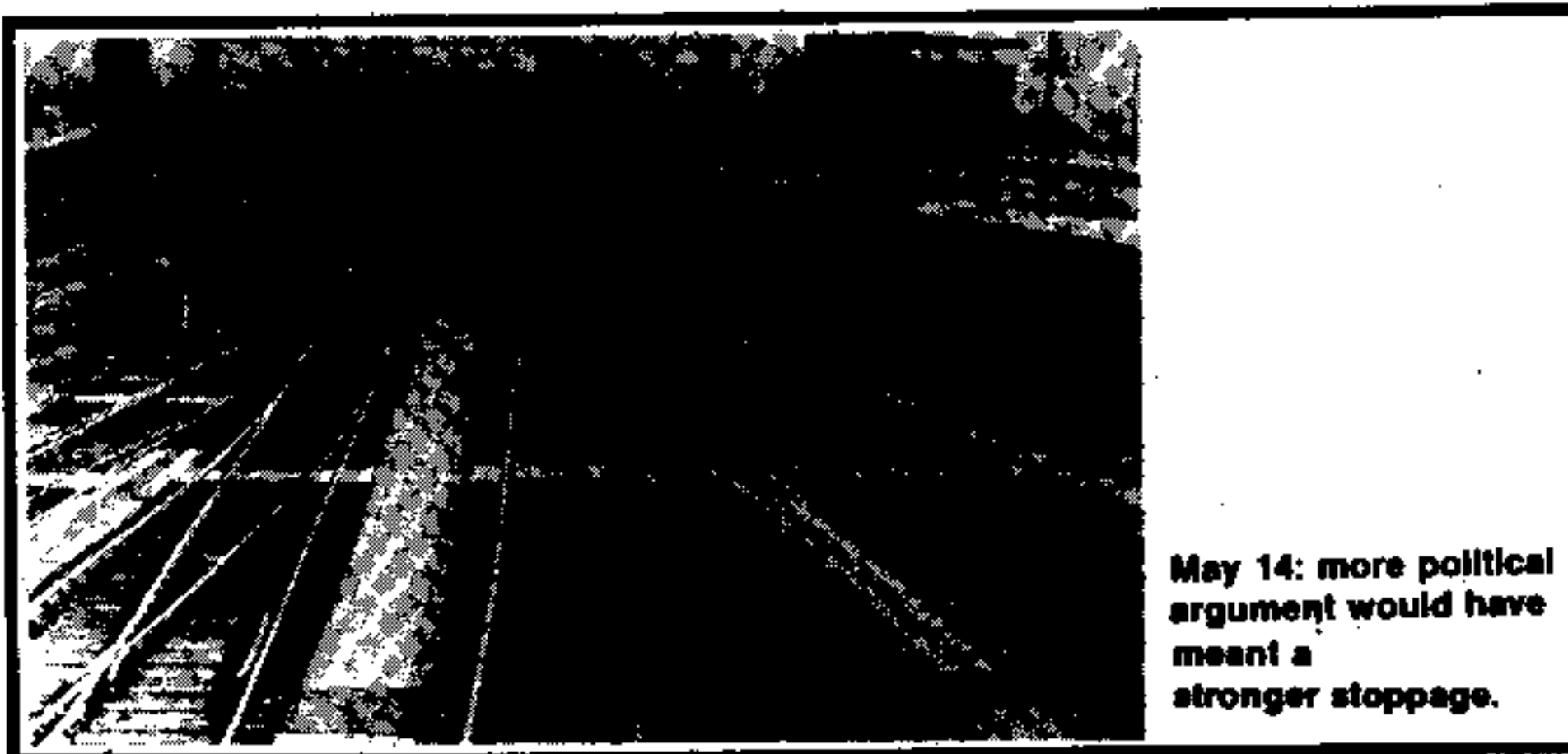
It is not simply a question of telling the truth before the masses, but also one of giving workers confidence that there is an alternative and being able yourself to offer that alternative openly.

This is where it is possible to make the leap from the workshop to the outside world. This is also where the differences between ourselves and the other organisations on the left become more apparent. If we are for all decision being taken on the shopfloor how can we possibly make any concessions on the question of Russia? Can we talk to our mates of the possibilities of socialism while apologising for Stalinist barbarism?

The case has never been more apparent for socialism. Millions of workers are presented each day with the contradictions and idiocies of capitalism. As Europe and America are covered in butter mountains and drowned in wine lakes, millions starve - and they do so publicly on our TV screens and in the pages of the Sunday supplements. At the same time unemployment soars and our own social services are cut to ribbons. So the chance to make socialist propaganda in the workshop, to pose the alternative, is easier now than it has been in the political lifetime of our organisation.

Hand in hand with that must come the commitment to the day to day trade union struggle, for a failure to defend basic trade union rights from the present Tory onslaught will destroy all political gains made in other spheres. Those who accuse us of 'economism' should realise that for us in the SWP the workplace is the key to social change. It is there that the power of capital is most nakedly expressed, but it is there also that it can most often be successfully challenged.

Jim Scott



May 14: more political argument would have meant a stronger stoppage.

Recognition disputes

'Unless you are sure that the dispute you are involved in is fought in your interests, don't trust the officials.'

Jaswinder Brar (one of the Chix strikers)

This was a bitter lesson which the Chix strikers learnt too late. The eight month strike for union recognition ended last month in bitterness and division, with acrimonious calls for the sacking of their regional official, Jeremy McMullen, following accusations of vote fixing.

The company agreed to recognise the GMWU, but only to reinstate the 19 day-shift workers. They claim that they no longer need the evening shift and so refuse to take the majority of strikers back. The union accepted this, quibbling only over the amount of redundancy pay to be granted to the sacked workers.

Yet 24 scabs, recruited since the strike began, remain at work in the factory. It is clear that the only reason Chix management conceded recognition was that the combination of blacking of Chix supplies and mass pickets was doing serious harm to their business. Yet it was precisely at that time, when the strikers were in a position of strength, that McMullen decided to make concessions.

Unfortunately the position at Chix, with the majority who fought so long and hard for the union finding themselves with nothing at all to show for it, is not unique. Most recognition disputes in recent years have shown similar features.

By definition, the strikes involve a workforce which is not normally experienced in the trade unions. Often the workers are immigrants or women or both, and have little or no tradition of organising.

This presents immediate difficulties. Often the workers are recruited to the union in a wave of enthusiasm, sometimes after one incident, as at Grunwick's, sometimes as a culmination of rapidly deteriorating conditions, as at Garners.

They see the union as their salvation, and at first put complete faith in it. It may be weeks or months before even a section of the strikers begin to see the problems which the union present them with: lack of involvement of the strikers, little or no strike pay, reluctance to call effective blacking.

Garners was a case in point. A strike in a steak house chain in Central London presented enormous problems. There were too many restaurants to picket all at the same time. Even if supplies were blacked, it was easy to get replacement steaks or bread rolls, which could be taken in in the boot of a car. The strikers had enormous problems in keeping going, especially on only £16 strike pay. Yet the union did little to mobilise support from its half million other members in the London area, either in the form of collections, solidarity pickets or blacking.

What was done happened mainly as a result of rank and file workers in other industries raising support and the strikers themselves visiting workplaces round the country.

Another problem facing such strikers is how to run the strike. Often, the old hierarchies inside the workplace reproduce themselves in the way the strike is run. Even where most of the strikers are women, as at Grunwick, a disproportionate number of the strike committee will usually be men. At Garners, half the strike committee were restaurant managers. When the division did finally come on that committee, the managers all clearly lined up together against the cooks and waiters who wanted a more militant strategy. Often strike committees contain some of the local and regional union officials. Often they are not elected, and sometimes there is not even a proper strike committee at all, as at Chix.

All of which means that the people who are really carrying the strike, standing on the picket lines, suffering financial hardship and the real possibility of blacklisting, are not the people who are in control of the running of the strike. Often decisions will be made without consulting with the majority of the strikers.

The unions themselves play a curious and contradictory role in recognition disputes. On the one hand, they want to increase their membership and bargaining power. This is particularly the case in industries like hotel and catering, where whichever of the two general unions is successful will benefit from the influx of thousands of new members, looking for similar successes. That is why the GMWU has set up a new section—the Hotel and Catering Worker Union.

The union officials, at both local and national levels, are reluctant to go too far. They want union membership in the small, unorganised workplaces, but they don't want to pay too high a price. For the leaders of APEX and the UPW, the mass pickets and the blacking of mail at Grunwick were an embarrassment which they wanted to avoid. Yet the officials know recognition disputes often *do* need highly militant tactics. That is why early on they sometimes welcome revolutionaries working with the strikers, building for mass pickets and so on. But in the end, they would rather sacrifice the strike than see those sorts of mobilisations get out of hand, and result in one of the things they fear most—illegal mass solidarity action. Undoubtedly with the passage of the Employment Bill, they will become even more timid.

The other real problem for the officials is that their role as negotiators—essentially mediating between all their members and management—doesn't fit recognition disputes at all. They are not like the annual wages round where you put in for one figure knowing you'll settle for less. Instead they



are about the whole existence of the union in any one workplace. Either you have a union or you don't. That isn't negotiable.

People like McMullen behave as though it is. What's important to them is to be able to say the union has won at Chix regardless of the fact that without many of its best fighters it will be severely weakened inside the factory. That the majority of strikers have lost their jobs is of secondary importance.

Because their attitude is one of negotiation, in other words, willingness to compromise, officials also make concessions which can weaken the strike. The TGWU official at Sandersons, a small factory making fork lifts in Skegness, agreed to call off blacking of Sandersons' stand at a major exhibition, in return for discussion of union recognition. Had the blacking stayed on, Sandersons would have lost orders worth thousands of pounds. As soon as the show finished the company reneged on the agreement, and the strike was eventually lost.

At Chix McMullen called off union blacking even before the women had discussed the settlement.

It's no wonder that so few recognition disputes win. Chix may not be such a total defeat as Garners, Grunwick and Sandersons, because at least some of the women have been taken back and the union recognised. But Chix management will be watching the divisions and weakness of the union, and will try to take advantage of it as far as possible. It will also not be pleasant for the women strikers to be in a minority among scabs in the factory.

The lesson which comes out above all other is the need for rank and file organisation which can cut across different workplaces and unions. Only solidarity from organised workers is going to help new groups of workers to get organised too. The courage and determination of those workers is not in doubt. Past recognition disputes have thrown up some of the best militants in the working class movement.

Mohammed Mahboob chairman of the Garners strike committee, said near the end of their 18 month strike, that he had learnt more through the strike—about politics, unions and organisation—than if he had gone to university. Which is true. But if most of us had to take degrees like that, we'd never get through the first year exams.

Lindsey German

Defending the line—with difficulty

The first lot of redundancies in the recent past were in December. The company gave 80 days notice in October. The stewards expressed immediate opposition and at a mass meeting they got overwhelming support for a policy of short time working as an alternative to redundancy. But the company decided to go ahead, there was a limbo on the shop floor, people didn't know what was happening and things drifted.

The stewards reaffirmed their decision and recommended strike action. But a sizeable proportion of the stewards did nothing about that and did not believe that the company could be beaten. They felt that they were fighting a multinational company, that the models at Linwood are either pretty unsuccessful or ancient, and that to defeat a multinational would involve a huge campaign that would involve going to other workers.

Among the leading stewards at Linwood there was, I think, a certain tendency for people to take up positions because they felt the need to maintain their image in terms of the formal attitudes of the trade union movement. But although the formal position was taken to oppose the redundancies, it was a very limited decision. When we argued for a campaign of blacking all Peugeot Citroen products and that meant going to the docks etc, then every negative argument was pulled out to oppose us: the members wouldn't respond; when there had been picket lines in the past very small numbers had been left to carry them, etc.

There was a tradition of shop stewards' bulletins to members, and SWP members had consistently argued for shop stewards' bulletins as part of the preparation for anything. So there were two or three shop stewards' bulletins during six or eight weeks or so between the announcement of the redundancies and the redundancies taking place. Other than that there was very little. There were visits to MP's which involved small numbers of people, the Scottish TUC—I think that was about it.

But in terms of mobilising the members, the only way you could fight such redundancies, there was no attempt made.

At the same time, the question arose of whether people would lose all rights to redundancy pay if we took action after the company had given 80 days notice under the Employment Protection Act. The answer to that was 'yes', and that obviously had some effect. The financial inducements weren't anything very attractive, and I think what was crucial was the brick wall of feeling that there was no way that the company could be beaten. So in the end a mass meeting voted to accept the redundancies.

That failure last time had its effect with the most recent redundancies. It was used by a lot of people to say, 'We took the right decision last time, but the members refused

The rapid development of the economic recession means that the problem of how to fight redundancies and factory closures is one of the most important facing socialist activists in industry. The problem is especially acute in areas like Merseyside, the West of Scotland, the North East of England, South Wales. One workforce very much hit by the crisis at the moment is that at the West of Scotland's biggest factory—the Talbot (formerly Chrysler) plant at Linwood near Glasgow.

Peter Bain, a senior TGWU steward in the plant, spoke to Socialist Worker about the problems they have faced as the second bout of redundancies have hit them in seven months, a prelude to what he sees as the firm's intention to close the factory.



Peter Bain

to support us.' And that killed the fight this time.

Basically the situation is still the same. People don't have the confidence to take on a multinational company like Peugeot. Then there are the effects of the Redundancy Payments Act and the Employment Protection Act. These have taken the bite out of a whole lot of fights. I don't know in this area, or nationally either, of a successful fight against unemployment, redundancy or closure since the Employment Protection Act came into force.

The most glaring example I know was at the Goodyear Tyre factory which about a year ago had taken a decision to fight the closure.

When they imposed sanctions, the company immediately put out a notice saying that the workforce had to realise that they could lose all redundancy payments. There was immediate pressure for a mass meeting and the membership overturned the decision to fight. That's happened time after time. I really don't know how that's going to be overcome.

The two recent spates of redundancy have

to be seen against the background of what happened five years ago, when a decision to occupy in opposition to redundancies was overturned at the last minute.

In October 75 Chrysler announced they were pulling out of Britain and successfully blackmailed the Labour government into giving them £162m. We—and a whole number of other people—argued that that wasn't the answer, that we should demand the nationalisation of Linwood. At that time the stewards took that decision, a mass meeting took that decision, and there was a fairly active campaign in favour of the policy. When we got nearer the date, the workforce opposed the redundancies and committed themselves to occupying the plant if the redundancies due took place early in January 1976.

What then happened was that the national officials were brought in and the chair, at the final national delegate meeting, instructed them to vote that the workforce should accept 8,300 redundancies out of 25,000 throughout Chrysler UK. At Linwood, there was a stewards' meeting on 31 December 1975 where the staff were

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INDUSTRIAL DISCUSSION SECTION

brought in—although the staff unions had not previously attended joint shop stewards' meetings—and ASTMS, that only virtually represents the foremen turned out 50 shop stewards who voted to a man for the government's so-called rescue plan. It was carried by a vote of 156 to 129—so the staff votes were decisive. That took the feet away from under the whole thing.

Also important were statements, not only from union officials, but also from at least one leading steward during the period the plant was laid off arguing for voluntary redundancies. All that helped to create the feeling that there was nothing much to be done.

Yet 129 stewards voted against the deal and a sizeable proportion of the membership understood that it was a very temporary measure. People said, 'Well, once the government money runs out in '79-80 then this place is going to go.' And that is precisely what is happening now.

Yet some of the same people who at that time predicted it, are now trying to deny that it's happening, and are still saying things like, "Well what we really need is more investment, a new model, and we should be trying to pressurise MPs or the country in some way". When you look at that against the background of what's happening in the car industry and what Peugeot's resources are in Britain then it's just a nonsense.

The vast majority of the members and the stewards believe that the place is going to close. But many of the stewards don't want to admit it.

That would mean organising a fight they don't think they can win. They would be venturing onto ground which they feel uneasy about. Yet we're talking about what is still the biggest factory in the West of Scotland and I think it would provide a focal point for thousands of workers who don't like what's going on. The 14 May obviously showed that in this area, anyway, there's this feeling of antipathy towards the government. People feel that something should be done, but they're not sure what. The only way that's going to be resolved is

through action. And if action got off the ground that campaign would develop.

But there is still some fight over wages and conditions. Today at Coventry they're discussing formulation at national, combine level of the annual wage claim. For the vast majority of people the offer on the basic wage is going to be very small, and it's going to be tied to a productivity deal which means that one way or another it will entail job loss.

I don't think a lot of the members at Linwood are prepared to give up conditions. It's always been the experience that when conditions were attacked at sectional level, people were prepared to defend these conditions. Even today, the day before the redundancies take place, there was a safety stoppage for something over an hour in one of the buildings. In the building I work in the mechanical inspectors stopped for an hour and half because the company put quality engineers on the line and the inspectors claimed that these were doing their work and stopped. I think that there's a real resentment there and that it's a question of not allowing that just to moulder into demoralisation and helplessness.

It's crucial that it's channelled in the direction of saying, 'Right, there is a fight that we can wage here....'

In the last lot of redundancies, I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that at the stewards' meeting it was SWP members who carried the argument for resistance from the shopfloor. The platform formally put the stewards' position. But I think it was SWP stewards who carried the argument. And we didn't just campaign at that level. We put in a bulletin at least once a week and sometimes twice a week. We did argue that the only way to win was the type of campaign I've described earlier. And we did get some sort of response. It's stupid to pretend we got a massive response, but numbers of the workforce did realise that was the only way you could fight.

This time round the decision was taken very quickly. The company announced the redundancies on the Tuesday. We put a

bulletin in on the Wednesday and another on the Friday, the day of the mass meeting. Since then we've put in bulletins on a regular basis—one's going in tomorrow—saying the fight back's got to start. That really has been the way we've tried to operate.

There's little doubt, in the building in which I work, the company fixed the starting date from which redundancies would apply—they are on a last-in, first-out basis—so as to hit two of our members. To do this they've got up to incredible antics. Even by their own methods of calculating jobs, they're hopelessly short of labour in order to ensure that these two individuals go out the door.

That's not because we're fantastically strong, but because we offer some kind of perspective, some kind of possibility of struggle. Over the years we've succeeded in gathering numbers of people around about us, either directly into the SWP or around it, selling the paper and supporting what we say. The company are certainly aware of our presence and the sort of things we've been doing.

Two SWP members who are on the TGWU works committee argued "We recognise these redundancies will lead to closure and we oppose closure". We carried on the argument for 45 minutes—the best part of an hour—but at the end of the day I think we got one more vote out of the 17 people who were there.

The negotiating committee's position was to urge the members to accept and to fight for the best possible terms for redundancy. Because we'd been defeated at the T&G works committee when it came before the negotiating committee, I could express my opposition, but I couldn't vote against it and in any case I think I would have been in a minority of one. And at the joint shop stewards, as a member of the negotiating committee I was bound by the decision of the negotiating committee to accept redundancies. I was able to speak in terms of what I saw as the company strategy and the need for a fight, which I said would have to come sooner rather than later. But other members were able to argue more openly. If it had been a matter of having to resign in order for the argument over principles to be put, I would have done so, of course—although you always have to take account of the concrete situation, whether the company would see that as a weakness to take advantage of etc.

One of our members had to do this in the past. But normally we don't need to.

We've had accusations from some people that there's been secret SWP meetings and that these are the people that put the bulletins in. But it's stupid, even from their point of view to use that argument, because the one thing we can't be accused of is being a secret organisation in the place. We argue our case in work, at the stewards meetings, at the building meetings, among the members at the section meetings, we put in bulletins and we sell quite a lot of papers.

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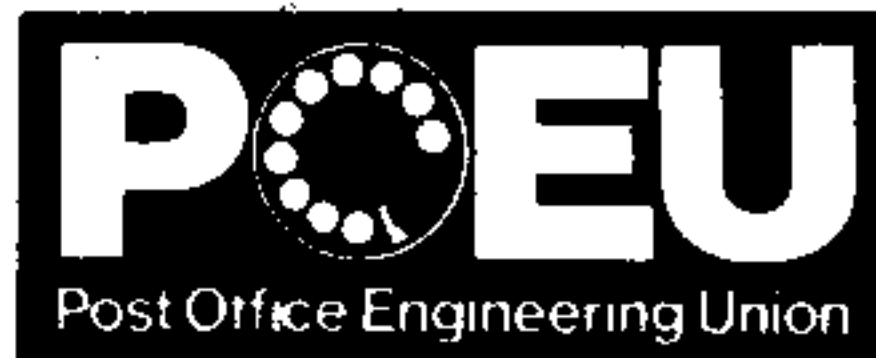
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Buzby begins to bark

The week of annual conference is the one time in the year when the rank and file really do control their union, or at least their delegates do. That at least is the theory. In practice what usually happens is that the NEC manages to manipulate conference and the votes in order to ensure that nothing happens to disturb the status quo.

This year that changed in the Post Office Engineering Union. The Broad Left, formed only three years ago, made history and challenged the right for the leadership of the union. History was made when, for the first time at least since the end of World War Two, the NEC and the general secretary, Bryan Stanley, were defeated by the floor over the 1980 pay claim. The challenge to the right wing came during the elections for the new NEC with the Broad Left picking up another two seats to add to the seven already gained and held.

On pay, the NEC had presented a document to conference outlining a claim for an increase in pay of 23% plus 4% for productivity—this in reply to a Post Office 'offer' of 14% plus 2% prod. Conference however was having nothing to do with either.

The Broad Left had pushed for a claim for 30%, without strings, in the period immediately prior to conference and on the day a number of propositions appeared on the agenda with 30% attached to the claim. The net result of this was that the NEC's original document was amended to read 30% without any strings, and a further amendment calling for an additional 7% in return for continued cooperation in modernisation was also inserted into the document.

The general secretary, close to apoplexy, pleaded with conference to reject the 'unrealistic demands' of the amendments and was defeated for his pains. The claim now goes to the Post Office for 30% plus 7% from the 1 July, with industrial action from 4 August to achieve that aim. This represents a considerable victory for the rank and file and the Broad Left over the established leadership.

The NEC elections probably produced the most surprising results of the week. It was anticipated that we might win one seat in Scotland but in the event we won two seats from the right and successfully held on to the seven seats we already hold. This now gives the Broad Left nine of the 23 seats on the NEC as opposed to three seats just four years ago.

These victories on pay and NEC elections, in addition to others during the week, came

as a result of consistent hard work both in the branches and on the floor of conference over many years. It shows what organised, disciplined activity can achieve by posing alternative policy and strategy to that offered by the leadership for the last 30 years. Not just posing, the Broad Left has

shown the correctness of its tactics, and more and more we are seen by the membership as the only ones with solutions to the complex problems facing the union of increasing change.

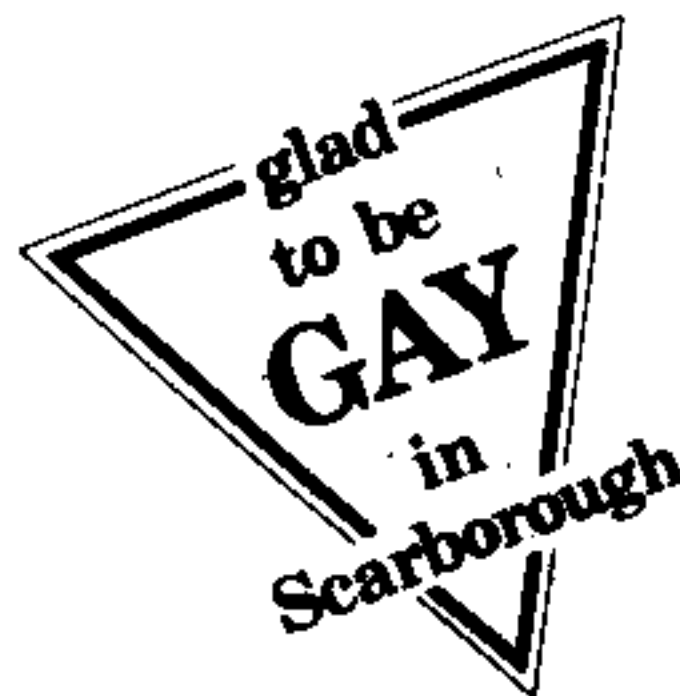
The Broad Left still has a long way to go and we still have to resolve some internal problems. But there can be no doubt now that there is no viable alternative to the existing organisation. There were those who doubted the need for a formal organisation (in particular the CP), but it has to be conceded even by them that the Broad Left has been successful and will continue to be so if we have the correct policy and remain committed to the rank and file as the fundamental base of the union.

Bryan Macey

Scarborough gets a shock

This year's National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education conference would have been the usual monumental bore, alleviated only by cushy hotels and much socialising, had it not been for some interesting rank and file stunts.

The first issue was the venue—Scarborough. In 1976 the town refused to allow the Campaign for Homosexual Equality to hold its conference there because of the offence that an invasion of fun loving homosexuals would give to the local seaside community. CHE asked other organisations to boycott the place and has recently repeated the request. NALGO, SCPS, NUS, NAPO and the Liberal Party abided by the call, but despite several attempts through the official union machinery to reverse a decision to meet in Scarborough in 1980, NATFHE went ahead.



Our stunt was very effective. Around a third of the delegates wore our "Glad to be Gay in Scarborough" stickers and in the process discovered what it feels like to be refused drinks in bars for being gay. The official conference welcome from the mayor was interrupted by lusty renderings of Tom Robinson's song, 'Sing if you're glad to be gay' from delegates and heckling from onlookers with the Gay Teachers banner in the gallery. "Gays are people too hecklers tell Mayor", was the front page headline of that day's issue of the local rag.

Our next trick was to organise a walkout of one third of the delegates on the Tory

junior minister, McFarlane, who the National Executive had produced for the edification of delegates. Official attempts to get him deleted from the agenda were defeated after speeches from the Broad Left who told us that the union would be brought into disrepute and talked of the necessity of hearing what he had to say etc etc etc.

And finally a minor victory was won on behalf of the many thousands of part time hourly paid teachers in Further and Adult Education Colleges. The system of paying them is grossly unfair but is defended by local authorities and some sections of the union on the grounds of allowing 'flexibility', for which read the ease of making cuts and worsening of conditions of full-time teachers. Our tactic this time was to use stickers and leaflets bearing slogans such as "End casual labour now" and "No full time work for part time pay" —produced as part of an official campaign by the Broad-Left controlled Inner London Region of NATFHE. Three part timers distributed these to delegates outside the conference, looking ragged and poverty stricken and wearing placards such as "NATFHE don't care" and "I work full time—I earn £3000". (The normal salary of a full time lecturer is perhaps £6000). We managed to get up the noses of the Broad Left who want any alteration of part timers conditions to be done "decently" and were opposed to this issue being prioritised because it would be "divisive". What they mean is that it would prioritise the interests of the lowest paid and most exploited section of the union above those of the massed ranks of principles and heads of department who run the union. They managed to use these arguments in opposition to any calls for flate rate salary increases, reductions in differentials or mergers of the bottom two scales—a long running sore point with many of the union members who actually face classes to earn their daily bread as opposed to sitting in offices "managing".

Sybil Cock

astms

The tight white collar

This year's ASTMS conference was the second held since Thatcher got to Downing Street. The difference between the two conferences hammered home two things: first, the unforeseen speed with which the Tories have carried out their attack; and second, the astonishing degree to which union leaders can appear to move leftwards during such an attack.

Last year's conference took place 16 days after the Tory victory, at a time when everyone still believed the threats contained in their manifesto would only be implemented after a period of softly-softly government. The TUC were queuing at the door of the negotiating room, waiting for the olive branches. The face of the ASTMS leadership, though a little flushed, was still facing the same way as it was under Callaghan, and the talk was not of class war, but of being able to regulate our own affairs without legal interference. But the period of caution expected of the Tories never came. Instead, they have moved faster and more violently than the most pessimistic amongst us predicted.

So this year's conference was different—all fine speeches about the history of the movement, no surrender, and fighting in every way on every front. The calm arrogance of trade union bureaucrats with a toe in the door of the ruling class has been replaced by a flustered, pompous anger. Now Thatcher has slammed the door in their faces, they have to go back to the members to drum up some support.

Hence the left face. In a conference that was for once marked for its efficiency in getting through the business, page after page of Tory policy was ritually torn up in public. The national executive quite correctly raged about cuts, unemployment, monetarism, the Employment Bill, cruise missiles, the lot. Their best tactic was to let some Tory delegates come to the microphone, then afterwards deliver a crushing retort just to show who really spoke for the working class. Much applause and whooping from conference.

It worked, too. At the end of the three days, the policy was there on paper, the faith was restored, but there was little in the way of real guts to the proposed campaigns against the Tory measures. Most of the initiative was left in the hands of national executive, and we all know what that means.

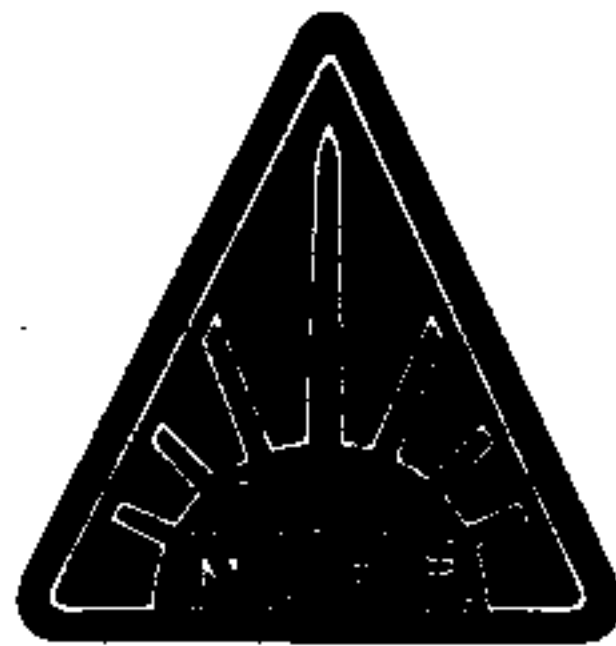
The worst thing of all was the adoration of the prospect of the next Labour government. It gives you a funny feeling in your stomach when you realise that after the thir-

teen month Tory blitz delegates are prepared to forgive and forget the last betrayal by Labour. Even Clive Jenkins' statement of support for Callaghan, made publicly the day before and repeated at conference, caused little stir. It was as if the political clock had slipped back years overnight, as if the only lessons to be learned from those years with Labour in power were to do with the internal party reforms now being debated.

As for the organised left at the conference, the *Red Collar* group worked as hard and as well as last year, only to stand still; the executive managed to steal everyone's political clothes, including ours. There were a few points of policy on which we showed a harder line, against import controls and against nuclear power, for instance, but a lot of the time our supporters were just calling for more explicit programmes of action on agreed policy. Absolutely correct, but not the stuff which catches the imagination of conference delegates.

The lessons are clear. If the union leaders can play at class war in the conference arena as successfully as anyone else, you can be sure the real battle orders are given *outside* that arena. When fine speeches are two a penny, the real job for militants is to show who can put those sentiments into action. It is the imagination of the mass of ordinary workers we have to catch now.

Colin Brown



Fisher scrapes home

The unelected leaders of the National Union of Public Employees kept their grip on the annual conference at Eastbourne last month. But only just. In the end they had to fall back on the cynical procedure of manoeuvres, empty demagogy and the solid support of the block of geriatric branch secretaries (the people who have retired

from work but continue to run the branches as if they were their personal property) who turn up every year.

The platform's greatest success was in the wages debate. Although conference passed overwhelmingly a resolution condemning the whole Clegg comparability exercise and there was a general recognition that sooner or later we would have to take on the Tories over wages, the only resolution which committed NUPE to a serious campaign was lost on a card vote.

What frightened the platform about the resolution was not the claim being proposed—an updating of the longheld objective of 2/3 the national average wage for our lowest paid members—but the demand for a special conference to decide what action to take following the reply to the pace-setting local government manual workers' claim. NUPE is now left, the second year running, with no real policy on wages, leaving general secretary Alan Fisher with a free hand.

The debate on the Tories' anti-union laws was much more positive. Although the most important resolution was not discussed, the platform clearly committed itself to a policy of defiance of the Employment Bill when it become law. It also failed to prevent conference from adopting the rank-and-file code of practice. Assistant general secretary Bernard Dix's attempts to identify support of it with 'a particular political organisation' and his claim that control of disputes by elected shop stewards committees would destroy the union, failed to frighten the majority of delegates.

That wasn't the only defeat for Fisher. He was knocked off the fence on the question of nuclear power, and his ambitions for the chairmanship of the TUC took a knock when conference decided on a policy of confrontation with the craft unions over the question of representation for NUPE on the negotiating bodies for craftworkers.

Conference adopted a principled resolution on the issue of Gay rights.

Whether the union will act on any of the resolutions is questionable. It will depend in the last resort on the initiative of the rank and file. The leadership has shown its contempt for conference by overruling a decision of the previous conference to ban all pay-beds from 1 January this year. And they will be encouraged by the failure of conference to censure them.

Unfortunately Fisher just got his way with the rules revisions proposals on the last day of the conference. A proposal to bar retired members from holding branch office would have cleared at a stroke much of the dead wood. But it was lost on a card vote—despite sponsorship by the union's executive council—because it was clear that Fisher was opposed to the change.

Then the old guard paid Fisher back for his support by manoeuvring to destroy a resolution which would have forced the general secretary to stand for election every four years. It was a bitter climax to a confe-

rence in which rank and file militants had won the argument on all the important issues. We lost on the votes because although people know a struggle against the Tories is inevitable, many are not prepared

to commit themselves concretely to it.

The rank and file bulletin produced daily for the conference was a great success, gaining tremendous respect and authority.
John Hill

nalgo

No go in Nalgo

This was my fourth annual Nalgo conference and for me the most uninspiring. I couldn't help feeling that the wind bags have said all they have to say. Militant speeches from the NEC wear a bit thin when they are not backed by action.

Last year's 'we'll fight, fight and fight again' from Geoffrey Drain sounded an empty threat when the union would not commit itself to opposing *all* cuts. This year we had to wait a while for the major set-piece speech on the NHS, but when it came it rang pretty hollow as well. Apart from a few Keith Joseph fans, Drain said nothing to offend anyone and the NEC motion failed to commit the union to doing very much to stop the demolition of the welfare state. He received a standing ovation nonetheless.

On the first day of conference we were split into our difference service groups: health, local government, gas, electricity etc. At breakfast the 8 o'clock news reported that Nalgo was prepared to fight for an improved pay offer for the nurses. Great. The health group meeting voted for a fight. But this decision was taken a week or two after the Royal College of Nurses had rejected any militant action. The RCN have ten seats on the nurses pay negotiating body—Nalgo has two. Cynics might ask why the Nalgo leadership had not made a public statement *before* the RCN decision. The answer could be that they want to recruit nurses to Nalgo by appearing to be a union with some guts but they don't want to be put to the test. At the time of writing the question of nurses pay is still undecided and COHSE, another nurses union, is still in conference, but I can't see the Nalgo leadership leading the fight—it will have to come from below.

If the local government meeting had been held a few weeks earlier, I'm sure things would have been hotter. At the end of the fight over comparability many Nalgo members, particularly low-paid women, were disappointed to find that their pay rises were tiny in comparison with the money awarded to the managerial grades. But unfortunately, although low-paid women are the majority in Nalgo, there were not very many of them at conference. The question of pay was not really discussed and moves to gain precedence for a motion to discuss action around this year's claim were defeated. The

local government meeting was, however, adjourned to a later date in order to discuss the employers' official response to the claim.

Many delegates did fairly well out of the comparability award and unless we can campaign now in the workplaces for a fight to achieve the full claim I'm afraid the these same delegates will accept 13 percent as the going rate in the public sector.

One victory, even if the motion was a muddle, can be claimed over typists' pay. Nalgo Action Group had begun a campaign—the Typists' Charter—which had already resulted in several groups of typists taking action over local claims. This work paid off when the platform was narrowly defeated on a card vote and the union was committed to supporting local claims, and to improving typists' pay nationally.

Throughout the week the NAG and the SWP proved themselves to be *the* left in the union. Usually the best speeches were from

amongst our ranks and our daily meetings to discuss the bulletin and our intervention in debates attracted new supporters. By contrast the Broad Left were at times indistinguishable from the platform. On one occasion they resorted to the old trick of closing the debate before it had really started. This debate was on picketing. Nalgo has grown into a trade union in the past few years, but our official policy still makes us a scab union when it comes to picket lines, even our own. The Broad Left opposed a motion that would have given Nalgo a respectable policy, but even worse, after their star speaker had done his turn, they moved that 'the question be put' to avoid a proper debate.

The spinelessness of the whole NEC was revealed in the debate on conference venues. Nalgo had a policy against holding conferences in Scarborough because of the local council's attitude to gays. An attempt to change that policy was not opposed by the NEC, and not one NEC member voted either way. Fortunately the policy was carried on a card vote even though it had been defeated on a show of hands.

There were discussions on many important issues from new technology to nuclear power, which I have no space to go into. Generally, I had the impression that although conference was fairly flabby and most of the motions called on the TUC or the government or anybody rather than the members to take action, there was a sizable minority who are looking for some kind of lead for a real fight back.

Phil Jones.

Words of defiance

Are Print Unions to defy the Employment Act?

Last month the three biggest print unions took decisions that could lead to major confrontations if any publisher or printer uses the Employment Act against printworkers. The Society of Graphical and Allied Trades ((203,000 members), The National Graphical Association (110,000 members) and the National Society of Operative Printers, Graphical and Media Personnel (54,000 members) have all said they will defy the new law if it is used against them. The biennial meeting of NATSOPA's governing council held in June carried a motion calling on the TUC to call more days of action aimed at the Tories, and called for the mobilisation of industrial action against the public spending cuts.

At the NGA's biennial delegate conference in Blackpool, general secretary, Joe Wade, said: 'This union intends to go on wading in with the TUC's campaign against the Government's industrial legislation—and if we don't get TUC support we intend to go wading in on our own.' Joe Wade reaffirmed his willingness to go to prison as

a consequence of the fight against Tory policies, and said that the union would be putting its funds at risk. He added: 'If the Tories will not listen to the voice of reason, then let them feel the weight of our industrial muscle power.'

Readers with memories will be inclined to greet such words from union leaders with a big dose of scepticism. But they do reflect an unwillingness of many printers to tolerate any legal interference in their unions.

Print workers played a leading role in the fight against the Tories' Industrial Relations Act between 1971 and 1974 and Fleet Street was closed down when the Pentonville five were jailed. Fleet Street was shut down solidly on the May 14th day of action. Printworkers are worried that the newspaper bosses will use, or at least attempt to use, the Employment Act in the fight to impose new technology, break up the long established closed shop in the print and call major redundancies. Print union leaders may well have to turn their fine words into action before too long.

Stuart Axe

The West Bank fights back

Even for the American press, last month's car-bombings of three West Bank Palestinian mayors were an outrage. In a quite unprecedented criticism *Time* described the Israelis responsible as 'terrorists' and as 'fanatics', as 'thugs' and the 'Ku Klux Klan of Israel'. But what has really been happening? *Phil Magfleet* looks at the background.

In maiming the mayors, the Zionist bombers provided a terrible reminder that should direct us back to the real issues. Israel remains a colonial settler state which is still expanding. The violence done to the Palestinian people is not finished. On the West Bank, Israel's newest colony, it has been raised to a new level of mass repression. In fighting back the Palestinians have transformed the West Bank into the Soweto of the Israeli empire.

The West Bank and Gaza – occupied by Israel during the 1967 war – have been the main point at issue in all the 'peace' discussion of the last ten years. In the absence of the Palestinians a whole string of plans have been advanced – for a 'mini-state' on the West Bank, connected to Gaza; for an 'autonomous' West Bank with a Palestinian 'national authority'; for a Palestinian state federated into Jordan; for a 'bantustan' West Bank remaining under Israeli military control. All have foundered. And all have been proved quite unreal, not merely because they have been diplomatic games which have effectively ignored the aspirations of four million Palestinians, but because as the years have passed it has become quite clear that successive Israeli governments have no intention of conceding the West Bank. It is as much part of their empire as Jerusalem or Tel Aviv.

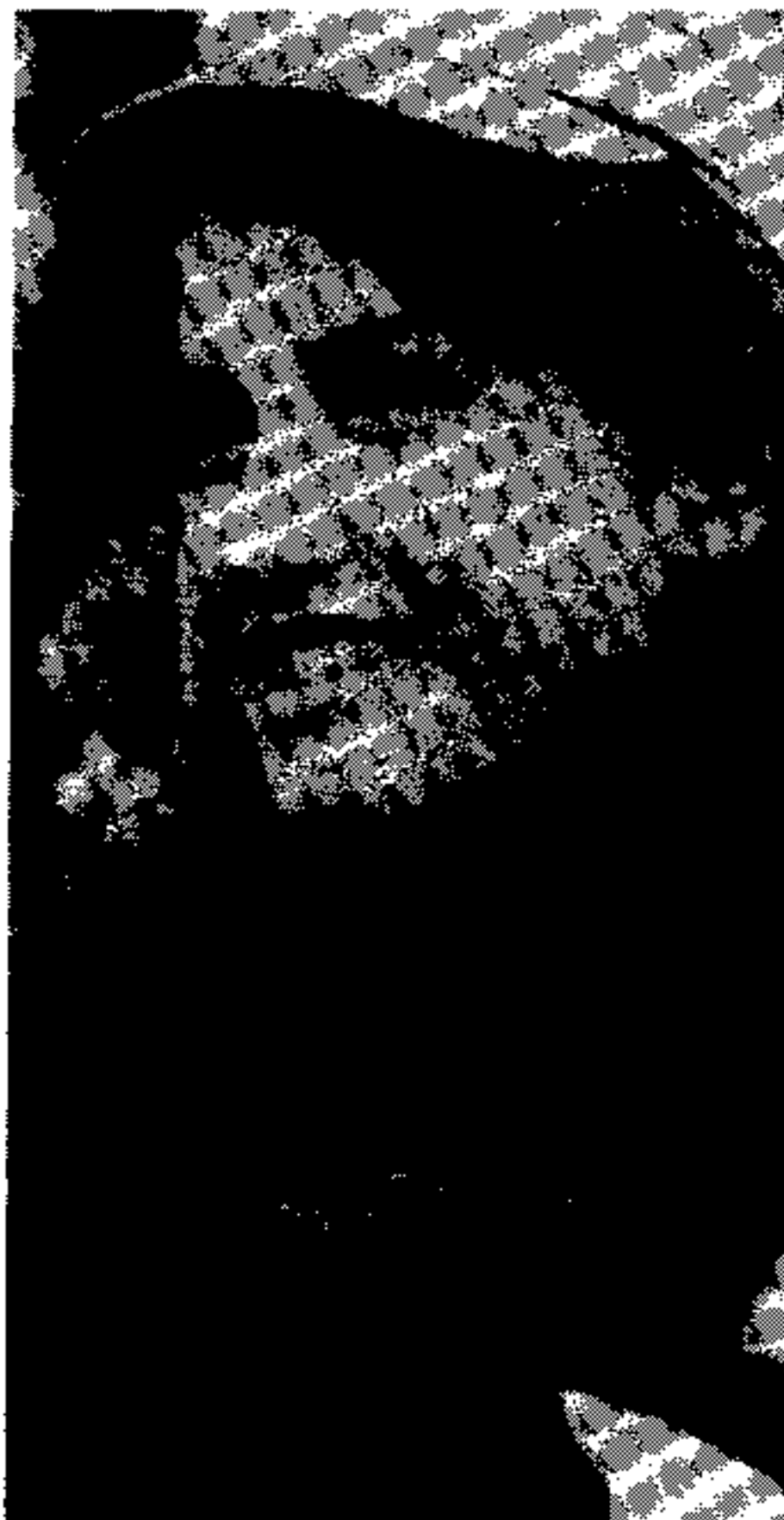
The West Bank Today

The West Bank has not passed through thirteen years of Israeli occupation unchanged. Most important, it has been almost wholly incorporated into the Israeli economic system.

At the time of the Israeli occupation the working class of the West Bank was tiny – the huge majority of West Bank Palestinians being peasants or small tradesmen and business men. Today more than 60,000 Palestinians are industrial workers in Israel, commuting across the 'Green Line' on a daily basis in much the same fashion as the black workers of apartheid South Africa. They are indispensable to the transport, construction and light manufacturing industries, providing the mass of cheap labour which fuelled the expansion of Israeli capitalism in the early 1970s.

Approaching fifty per cent of the West Bank labour force work legally or illegally in Israel. In addition to the

advantage of their cheap labour – Palestinian wages are commonly half those of Israeli workers – the Israeli government obtains contributions from employers for all labour registered. This averages 30 per cent of each worker's income, which formally is 'returned' as social benefit. In fact such benefits are not payable on the West Bank, where Israeli Law is said not to operate! Thus in 1977 alone Israel procured 153 million Israeli pounds directly from Palestinian labour.



While Palestinian labour has flowed into Israel, Israeli products – food and consumer goods – have poured into the West Bank. The West Bank now constitutes Israel's largest export market.

But Israel has invested in more than a trading relationship with the area. A considerable infrastructure has been built up over the years of occupation: the basis of a comprehensive road system seen as vital for military communication connects Israel 'proper' to the Jordan Valley; and most important, a network of wells and pumping stations gives access to West Bank water supplies.

Both human and physical resources from the West Bank have become important factors for the Israeli economy. But their relative weight has been magnified by the deepening slide of Israel into crisis. Inflation, which ran for several years after the '73 war at 30% to 40% has more than doubled. All the usual indices – balance of trade, GNP

and the rest – show the economy to be stagnating.

This would be serious enough in any Western economy. In Israel it is catastrophic. Israel has only survived on massive capital funding from abroad, with the United States the chief supplier – providing \$7,075 million in direct aid alone between 1973 and 1976. So the exploitation of West Bank labour, resources and markets is of enormous importance.

Israeli colonisation

The principal objective pursued by the Israelis over thirteen years of occupation has been, as Begin has put it, 'to create facts' – to colonise the West Bank. Throughout the 1970s work has been carried on which has established a whole network of Zionist settlements on Palestinian land. By 1979 there were 110 colonies in the occupied territories. They had secured 20%-25% of the total land, and an estimated 70% of the West Bank's most fertile land – along the Jordan Valley. The settlements at present contain some 14,000 people, with a further 35,000 living in the East Jerusalem suburban development – also built on land conquered and confiscated in 1967.

The colonisation of the West Bank is an extension of the tradition of settlement which from the early 1920s has characterised the whole operation of establishing a Zionist state. The Israeli government – and most prominently Begin himself – has claimed that settlement is an inalienable historic right and indeed a religious duty in the whole area of 'Eretz Israel' – the 'Greater Israel' of biblical times.

The present level of settlement is the first stage in the process of incorporation of the whole West Bank. The World Zionist Organisation has specified details of their strategy in 'The Master Plan for the Development of Settlement in Judea and Samaria for the Years 1979-1983'. Mattityahu Droblis spells out that 'settlement in the entire Eretz Israel means security and settlement by right,' and that by 1983 it should have expanded to include 46 further settlements, with an influx of 27,000 families – between 100,000 and 150,000 more settlers.

This commitment to settlement emphasises two important elements in the Zionists' thinking. It reasserts, at a difficult period for the Israeli economy, with rumbles of discontent on all fronts, all the most narrow chauvinist values associated with the idea of national unity and the original Zionist frontier spirit of the early settler 'pioneers'. And it reemphasises the importance of the West Bank as an occupied 'buffer zone' for Israel in the event of another war

with the Arab States.

The Palestinian resistance

The Israeli strategy for the West Bank is obstructed by the presence of some 900,000 Palestinians who have begun to produce a mass movement of resistance. This is capable of throwing into question all the Zionist aims.

The prospect of such opposition existed from the beginning, for while the Israelis felt that they had 'tamed' those Palestinians still living in the area occupied in 1948 (Israel proper), they feared the West Bankers and Gazans might have a more independent will. Indeed for years Gaza mounted a fierce resistance. But the West Bank appeared to be quite passive, generating, perhaps, a false sense of confidence among the occupation forces.

Years of Jordanian rule prior to 1967 had helped consolidate the traditional local elite of judges, mayors, businessmen and landlords who were now often compliant in the Israeli plans. The military administration took care to operate through these collaborationist leaders and attempted to eliminate any alternative leadership by a policy of deportation. Beginning in September 1967 — less than three months after the invasion of the West Bank — it removed council members, students' and women's leaders, editors, school principals, village *mukhtars*, judges and the heads of charities and welfare organisations. Between 1967 and 1976 alone 1486 Palestinians were deported.

Today the situation has changed radically. The same layer of 'dignitaries', much changed in composition, is almost without exception organised in support of the Palestine National Front — in effect the PLO in the West Bank and Gaza. Mass opposition has been developing since 1976, when on the Palestinian 'Day of the Land' the largest West Bank towns organised a general strike against Israeli land appropriations. Throughout the period of the Camp David 'peace process', there have been further demonstrations and strikes — in East Jerusalem, in Nablus, in Ramallah, and one-day protests throughout the West Bank on the anniversaries of the expulsion of 1948 and the war of 1967. At Bir Zeit university — the only such institution under Palestinian control — there were demonstrations in May 1979, followed by closure enforced by the Israeli authorities for much of the year.

What caused the change in atmosphere and leadership in the West Bank? Most obvious has been the steady establishment of the Zionist settlements under the protection of the army and the benevolent eye of the Israeli government. Thousands of acres have been appropriated from the Palestinian peasants. They are overseen by armed settler militias which hark back to the murderous Zionist gangs of the '30s and '40s. The official 'Green Patrol' is directly affiliated to the Ministry of Agriculture and the Israel Land Auth-

ority. Its main purpose is to protect state and national (Zionist) lands from being 'usurped by foreigners', practising straight intimidation and terror against Palestinian land owners.

As resentment and protest has deepened so the Israelis have stepped up repression. Whole villages and towns have been put under curfews lasting several days. Mass reprisals, collective punishments, demolition of houses, destruction of whole areas of villages, confiscation of lands, detention without trial, torture — all have become commonplace. But there is one final element in the radicalisation of the West Bank which surely explains the Israeli intention to incorporate the area.



The new 'radical dignitaries' of the West Bank are *not* all representatives of the Palestinian rank and file. Like most others in leading positions in the Palestinian movement, they have been drawn from the 'professional' layers — doctors, lawyers, teachers, or are small capitalists. Karim Khalaf, for example, mayor of Ramallah, is a director of the East Jerusalem Electricity Company. The Israeli government has just withdrawn its sanction for the company to continue supplying the West Bank area, and ordered an effective integration into the Israeli electricity monopoly. West Bank businessmen in particular have been enraged by this removal of almost the last large Palestinian-owned enterprise. The Israelis have finally alienated even those of the Palestinian bourgeoisie that might have been used in a semi-autonomous client West Bank state. The West Bank is to be part of Israel: all opposition is to be crushed.

Prospects

The recent deportations and car-bombings have created an unprecedentedly bad press for Israel. That the Israelis recognise this is reflected in their near-panic over the EEC statement on Palestinian rights to a homeland, expressed by the despatch of a senior govern-

ment minister to the European capitals to argue the Zionist case.

But this should not lead us to believe that the overall international situation is tipped against Israel. On the contrary, in the Middle East the situation is brighter for the Zionists than at any time since the period after the war of 1967.

Sadat's abject capitulation has removed Egypt, the most populous, most militarily powerful, and the traditionally leading Arab state, from any possibility of active involvement against Israel. In Syria Assad is preoccupied with internal problems amongst the minority groups and the army, and with the on-off feud with Iraq. The 'Steadfastness Front' agreed at the Baghdad Summit, which promised Arab unity in support of Palestine and a punitive boycott of Egypt, has all but collapsed.

While the revolution in Iran has undoubtedly further destabilised the area, and has been a severe blow to American operations, it has brought material benefits to Israel, which has again been able to present itself as the most reliable guardian of Western interests, and has been rewarded with renewed American aid and the latest in US weaponry.

In addition the Israelis know that the PLO has been going through a difficult period. The guerrilla forces, while still intact, have been trapped in Southern Lebanon and kept under pressure by Haddad's neo-fascist Israeli-backed militia, and by frequent bombardment by the Israeli artillery. This has served principally to alienate the Lebanese Muslim population who during the civil war of 1976 had been the Palestinians' best allies. Today with their towns and villages in ruins they are turning much of their aggression on the PLO rather than on Tel-Aviv.

Inside the PLO too, there are the usual splits and divisions. Superficially the 'Rejectionists' (rejecting the diplomatic strategy in favour of a more determined armed struggle and of 'mass mobilisation') have been gaining ground. At the recent Fatah conference a commitment to the aim of liberation of the whole of Palestine, as against that of securing some variant of the 'mini-state' formula by negotiation, received overwhelming support. This builds a further tension into the relationship between Arafat and the PLO leadership, still, in reality, deeply committed to a diplomatic solution, and many of the guerrilla activists who are champing at the bit in their foxholes in South Lebanon, together with the militants of the West Bank and Gaza.

But there is a factor the Israelis cannot confront with any real satisfaction. Potentially the action of the 900,000 West Bank Palestinians is a far more serious threat than all the guerrilla raids. The challenge for the PLO, which now claims the support of the huge majority of the West Bank, is how far it can organise for mass struggle, and in particular exert the latent power of the West Bank working class.



"It's up to us to correct and give shape to Sir David MacNees's insight." Bristol demo after St. Pauls.

Coroners and cover-ups

It has taken the outcry over the recent death of Jimmy Kelly and Blair Peach to bring into the open the fact that there have been 245 apparently unexplained deaths in police custody or resulting from police action over the last decade. A Parliamentary Home Affairs Committee even took evidence on the subject from the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Coroners' Society and the British Association in Forensic Medicine.

Of these 245 deaths 26 have been a matter of complaint against the police and so duly reported to the Director of Public Prosecutions. But not once has the DPP decided that any further action should be taken with cases referred to him where the deceased allegedly died at the hands of the police. There have been no prosecutions.

The bland official reassurance that all is well contrasts strongly with the evidence amassed as long ago as the Liddle Towers campaign (Towers died in 1976) and now confirmed by the Kelly and Peach campaigns, that the police can get away, literally, with murder.

How does the official procedure work? First, investigations into complaints against the police are conducted by the police themselves — which is unlikely to be impartial. The investigating officer must be from another force. Yet in the Liddle Towers case, he had been previously in charge of the area he was being asked to look into, including his old mates.

The report, then, that goes to the

Director of Public Prosecutions is hardly likely to contain the kind of evidence required for a prosecution. The DPP also revealed, when questioned by the Home Affairs Committee, that though he had powers to examine further witnesses, he rarely or never did so (he wasn't too sure). In practice, therefore, the DPP is in the pocket of the police.

Decisions to mount a prosecution are taken on two criteria: first, on whether a conviction is likely; and secondly (and only if it's cleared this first hurdle), on whether it's in the public interest to do so. If police reports are as unsatisfactory as we suspect, then the second criterion must act as the clincher — who would want to risk a prosecution that strongly suggested but couldn't prove a police cover-up?

'Public interest' must also be weighing very heavily with the DPP over Operation Countryman, currently investigating the offences of corruption among the London police. Despite a recommendation that six officers be charged, the DPP has decided not to press charges — against the advice of the DPP's own lawyer, seconded to the inquiry! So when acting independently of the police he is even more protective of their interests.

As for the 219 deaths in police custody *not* the subject of complaint, we only have the word of the local police that there was nothing peculiar about them.

Given the odds against success, anyone suspicious of a death in custody is

bound to hesitate before filing a complaint — or is likely to get leant on by the police.

In the course of the Liddle Towers campaign, for example, allegations of police violence emerged in connection with another death in police custody. A Tynemouth Labour candidate, a solicitor, revealed that a witness under oath in court had claimed that a drunken policeman had beaten up a seventeen year old boy in the next cell to his own. The boy subsequently died. The family were pressurised into not pursuing the case.

Inquests

The second strand of official procedure involves the role played by inquests. These, at least, are public affairs, formally independent of the police and usually quiet and uncontentious. However, as the Towers, Kelly and Peach campaigns discovered, when it comes to inquests involving police behaviour they are as unhelpful as seeking action through a complaint.

The first reason is that coroners are not really independent. Honours and rewards accompany the profession. After the first Liddle Towers inquest the coroner received an OBE; after the second, the coroner was promoted. Presiding over the Blair Peach inquest was Mr J. Burton, Secretary of the Coroners' Society, who gave evidence (designed to reassure) to the Home Affairs Committee.

Other closer ties discredit even formal

notions of independence. The coroner is assisted in his duties by an officer, who does the job of personally collecting all the relevant information on behalf of the coroner. In the majority of cases this officer is a police officer, employed by the police (or the watch committee) and seconded to the coroner.

We also know that, in the Liddle Towers case, an informal meeting took place between the coroner, the Northumbria Police Force and the Home Office, at which no doubt the 'accidental fall' theory was discussed. (Towers was reckoned to have been killed by a policeman accidentally falling on him.)

So, general ties of loyalty, and specific links of dependence, make it improbable that coroners will question police actions.

The second reason is the discretion allowed to coroners. No statute obliges the coroner to hold an inquest into every death in custody, nor to hold one with a jury (except for deaths in prison). Home Office circulars guide his actions. Since Blair Peach's death was not technically a death in police custody, it took a High Court action to force the coroner to sit with a jury, on the grounds that 'the death occurred in circumstances the continuance or possible recurrence of which is prejudicial to the health and safety of the public or any section of the public.' (The disadvantage then was the delay caused.)

Jurors are selected through the coroner's officer — employed by the police! — and cannot be challenged even by the coroner. In practice, therefore, the police pick the jury. (One extreme example, from Glamorgan-shire, is where the regular foreman is the father of the policewoman asked to arrange the jury, the rest of the jury being his cronies.) Neither are they compensated for time off work. Despite successive attempts at reform, the coroner's jury is not the kind of broadly based body that in theory it is supposed to be.

The coroner's duty is 'to inquire as to whom the deceased person was, and when, where and how he came by his death.' The inquest is not a trial and does not seek to establish civil or criminal liability. For this reason, the procedures are 'flexible'; the coroner decides what evidence is relevant and witnesses are also told that they need not answer questions that might incriminate them.

This flexibility affords the police considerable protection. At the first Towers inquest, for example, seven of the eight police officers who arrested Liddle Towers did not go into the witness box to be submitted to cross-examination. All the jury had at their disposal were the original police statements, which were far from illuminating. The coroner also hampered proceedings by disallowing awkward evidence or awkward questions (awkward, that is, from the police's point of view).

The police have been afforded even

greater protection. In the Kelly inquest the coroner permitted only edited highlights of the Gerty report (the internal police report) to be available. In the Peach inquest, the Cass internal police report was never available. Yet the contents were known both to the coroner and the counsel representing the police.

But if the police are granted special privileges, on the grounds that they are not in the dock, no effort is spared to make the complainants — or even the dead man — appear guilty.

"Character assassination, bullying and abuse of witnesses have been features of all three inquests."

Liddle Towers, for example, was presented as a sinister criminal figure (he had one minor criminal conviction for stealing £3 of scrap metal... in 1963!) and a drunkard. Jimmy Kelly's neighbourhood was depicted as a criminal area where most of the population — including the civilian witnesses to his arrest — were consumed with hatred of the police. In the case of Blair Peach, it was sufficient to establish that witnesses were members of the ANL or SWP or that they were Asian in order to damn their testimony as the product of a conspiratorial tendency to lying.

Cross-examination has also favoured the police. At the Kelly inquest police lawyers had the advantage of questioning witnesses on matters about which the Kelly family knew nothing. Since they also went second they had the added advantage of having the last word in attempting to discredit hostile evidence. Similar advantages fell to the police in the Liddle Towers inquest: not only were they represented three times over — separate legal representation for the Chief of Police, the Police Authority and the Police Federation — but they had three opportunities to knock down anything important raised by counsel for the Towers family.

Character assassination, bullying and abuse of witness, have been features of all three inquests.

Overall, the whole process of inquests into deaths in police custody or resulting from police action amounts to a catch 22 situation.

A verdict of unlawful killing would mean convicting the police, despite the

fact that an inquest is not a trial. It would immediately raise the question why hadn't the police already started a prosecution against a police officer? But if a prosecution was going ahead, the coroner would have already adjourned the inquest, on the grounds that it could prejudice the outcome of the trial.

So the catch is this: the very fact that an inquest has completed all its stages and reached a conclusion implies that the police cannot be assumed to be criminally responsible. (Interestingly enough, the coroner at the Blair Peach inquest used this extremely dodgy logic as his major argument to the jury as to why they couldn't bring in a verdict of unlawful killing.)

Only in an inquest can evidence against the police be brought up; but the only appropriate verdict is the one ruled out in advance. Heads you lose, tails the police win. Allegations are turned into vindications of their innocence.

'Misadventure' — the verdict reached in the Kelly and Peach inquests, and in the second Towers inquest — is the one most convenient for the police. It doesn't absolutely deny their responsibility (with Blair Peach that amounted to admitting that the SPG had killed him); but it does mean that they don't have to take further steps to apprehend the killer.

Even if the inquests have proved to be stitch ups, the campaigns around them have been far from unimportant in challenging assumptions about the real role of the police in society and the lengths to which our rulers are prepared to go to defend them.

With police (and the armed forces) the only growth area in public services, and the Welfare State becoming threadbare, increasingly the only way to contain conflict and tension will be the authority the police can exert over the community. In this there is no fundamental difference between the elite SPG and the ordinary force — as the deaths of Towers, Kelly and Peach show.

Equally, however, the repressive, anti-working class nature of the police will emerge. As Sir David MacNee, London's top cop and 'thinker', recently said to his fellow police chiefs: 'adverse treatment by the media was one of the main reasons the police had lost public esteem. A recent tactic has been to take a few, unconnected incidents, such as Liddle Towers, James Kelly, Blair Peach and Operation Countryman — mention them in one sentence, ignore the facts in each case, and conclude there was a crisis of public confidence in the police.'

For someone who thinks they're unconnected yet lumps them together and who is unsure whether the media have created the crisis or imagined it, that's a remarkable admission.

It's up to us to correct and give shape to Sir David's insight.
Gareth Jenkins

Voice of the hanged

I came across the novels of B. Traven by accident — I saw a copy of *March to Caobaland* on a half-price bookstall and bought it out of curiosity over the strange name of the author. He is not one of those writers that older socialists usually recommend to younger ones. And when people do read him it is usually for a reason as accidental as mine — because he wrote the original of the John Huston film, *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*.

Yet Traven's novels — especially *March to Caobaland* and *The Rebellion of the Hanged* — are marvellous reading for any socialist. They are exciting, very readable stories, which tell what it's like to be on the receiving end of imperialism.

March to Caobaland is the story of a Mexican Indian peasant, Celso, trapped into debt slavery in a mahogany (caoba) camp deep in the jungle, which he slowly realises he will never be able to get away from, earning barely enough to sustain his endless labours.

'For the 50 centavos which Celso was getting per day, 20 centavos were deducted for food... Occasionally Celso felt like smoking and so he had to buy tobacco leaves. He needed camphor to heal mosquito bites... Occasionally he had to buy tallow to be used on his back after a whipping. Celso spent for clothes less than 10 per cent of what an American spinster spends on clothing for her lap dog.

At the beginning of the book Celso is still a peasant, incredibly naive about the world at large, taking it for granted that he has no choice but to cringe before white men. But as he treks to become a mahogany worker for the second time his attitudes change. He tells those who are new to the camps:

'Unless you become like caoba, hard like steel, then you will find your last resting place near one of the camps. Here you've got to fight tooth and nail against the *capataces* (gangsters), against the whippings and hangings, and above all against the jungle that wants to devour you...'

Yet he remains, in *March to Caobaland*, the victim of an imperialism he cannot begin to understand:

'If the *mucbachos* had been taken to New York and been shown there the offices of Central American Hardwoods, Chicle and Fruit Corporations, they would never have believed that such a small army of amiable men, girls and office boys lounging around desks were the power which had condemned them to the inferno of monterias, chicle camps and coffee and fruit plantations... Everyone in this long chain of men who were interested in the mahogany business was, himself, only a link completely

innocent of the cruelties, misery and suffering of the caoba workers. Everyone, had he been asked, would have replied, "I never knew anything like that could happen".'



We encounter Celso again half way through *The Rebellion of the Hanged*. The mahogany camps are more hellish than ever. In an effort to ward off bankruptcy, the owners have devised the spur to productivity of hanging Indians alive. The mood of the peasant-become-worker Celso is no longer acquiescent. A new worker is told of him, 'he was among the first of us to rebel'.

Yet, most of the Indians still hold back:

'None of these men had ever risen in rebellion in their lives. They had not even protected their faces when lashed with a whip. The masters, the descendants of the colonisers, the Spaniards, the white generally, all were gods against whom an Indian peon never dared to revolt. The Indians knew only two categories: gods and servants. And not being a god, one can only be a servant, a humble and submissive one.'

But a wider perspective is provided by the arrival as workers at the camp of three fugitives from crushed rebellions elsewhere in the country.

In a moment of desperation a group of Indians kill one of the white bosses. Suddenly they can't turn back.

They rise in a bitter, bloody, brutal rebellion, murdering the bosses, the foremen, the whites who provide services for the camps, their wives and children.

For Traven:

'It was no fault of the rebels that they were animated by sentiments of death and destruction. They had never been allowed to express their rights. A blind obedience was inculcated in them by flogging until it became second nature. Hence it was

not mere savagery which drove the Indians to kill and despoil. They gave proofs of cruelty only because their adversaries and oppressors were a hundred times more savage than they themselves...'

In the act of rebellion:

'The Indians learned something of which until then they had not had the least idea: that they themselves were capable of giving orders. Until that moment they had always imagined that in order to command it was necessary to be a crafty white ladino or a ruling class *gachupin*. Now they saw it was not difficult to give orders. Anyone can do that, right down to the most backward Indian, the most illiterate. An idiot is capable of being dictator.'

There is much more to *The Rebellion of the Hanged*. But for that you will need to read the book.

To my mind Traven's other novels (or at least the ones I've been able to get hold of) do not reach the same heights. *The Death Ship* — about deported immigrants compelled to spend their lives shuttling between ports doing the most arduous work on the most dangerous ships — is good, but drags on a bit. *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* contains some biting irony, but lacks the power of Traven's best works. *The Cotton Pickers* begins well, but degenerates into a sort of sentimental folksiness in places.

Traven's own identity was for long a mystery. But now it seems certain that he was originally Ret Marut, one of the anarchist literateurs involved in the Bavarian Soviet republic of April 1919. After its crushing, he made a near-miraculous escape from a death sentence to turn up a few years later in Mexico. Here he lived until his death in 1969 with the Indians and hoboes who provide the material for his novels.

The tone of the novels remains very much anarchist. But it is a powerful, insurgent, almost political anarchism which has learnt from Traven's own experiences of civil war in Germany and the Indians' experiences of fighting in the revolutionary armies of Villa and Zapata. There are faults in his anarchism. But it nevertheless enabled Traven to produce some of the best revolutionary novels of the twentieth century.

Chris Harman

Books by Traven

March to Caobaland and *Rebellion of the Hanged* used to be in Penguins, but are no longer in print. Still, you will probably find them in libraries and on second hand bookstalls.

Alison & Busby are reprinting nearly all of Traven's work. They have started with the *Kidnapped Saint and Other Stories* (£2.50 paperback), *The Cotton Pickers* (£2.50 paperback), *White Rose* (£2.50), and *Government* (the first of the jungle books' series that includes the two books I've most referred to). *March to Caobaland* is due later this year under the alternative title, *March to Monteria*.



English soccer fans in Turin after riots at the England v Belgium match.

The opium of our time

The deluge of hypocrisy, cold war posturing, sickening chauvinism and plain old fashioned commercial exploitation which surrounds the Olympic Games should force socialists to think long and hard about sport.

At one level, of course, this Olympic Games will be very funny to watch since the press and television will be tying themselves in knots trying to accommodate the competing claims of anti-Russian hysteria and chauvinistic eulogies to any 'British' successes. If anyone from this country should happen to win a medal then the editor of the *Daily Mail* is going to be batting on a very sticky wicket. And the marathon saga of who is and who is not going is taking place to the background of the British Lions rugby tour of South Africa, where all around their insulated white world police are shooting down black demonstrators.

Behind all of this is the very much more serious question of the place of sport in capitalist society. It is not simply the great spectacle and the great hypocrisies of sport which need to be talked about, but the whole damn business from earliest childhood onwards. To begin with, we need to make a distinction between sport as an organised activity and physical recreation. The latter seems to me an essential part of any rational human development, but sport is something else again. For example, a walk in Victoria Park, or a holiday tramping the Yorkshire dales, is physical recreation. A fifty kilometre walking race is a totally different thing. Physical recreation is about the deve-

lopment and enjoyment of one's body. Sport is not. Sport is about competing, winning, doing better than the next person, doing best. And it's also about obeying arbitrary rules, winning a good clean fight.

This has nothing to do with developing as a healthy human being. It has everything to do with living as a willingly distorted cripple in a capitalist society. What more fitting preparation could there be for labour in a capitalist society than voluntary subjugation to a physical discipline designed to produce maximum output. Or than an ideological discipline of competition and obedience?

Even the socialised aspect of labour present in team games is distorted into a capitalist form. Players are 'cogs in a machine' and a winning team is a 'steamroller'. This is not the socialist idea of collective activity as the condition for the development of each individual, but the barbarity of the capitalist factory turning human individuals into subordinates to the drive to competition.

Sport is a serious business. A deadly serious business since people die in the pursuit of victory. And those who do not die subject themselves to the sort of barbarity that is usually associated with police torture. The taking of very dangerous drugs is a common practice, but some of the methods employed are even more horrible than that. For example, one of the practices used by athletes engaged in endurance events is to have a quantity of blood removed just prior to a major competition. This stimulates the production of red blood corpuscles in the

remaining blood. The original blood is then transfused back into the athlete. The result is an abnormally high proportion of red corpuscles in the general blood stream. This results in improved performance and a better chance of winning.

Of course, the worst of these excesses are confined to a relatively small group of athletes selected for international competition. But the ethics penetrate right down so that sport at all levels is constantly using whatever techniques are available in order to 'improve performance'. The most striking example of this permeation is the way in which future star performers are selected. While, for example it is very sensible to teach all children to swim since it is both good exercise and a valuable skill, I can see little point in teaching them the butterfly stroke other than that it is a stroke used solely in competition and that perhaps one of the poor unfortunates forced through this rigorous and inefficient means of swimming might turn out to be good at it.

The most extreme examples of the organisation of all sport to catch potential champions young is found in the state capitalisms of Eastern Europe. In East Germany, for example, sport is compulsory in schools and bad marks in physical training mean examination failure. For those who show promise, there are special schools beginning at the age of ten which concentrate on sport. According to East German officials: 'It is essential to start selection very early, from the first or second year at school.'

In shambling, private capitalist, Britain,

things are not so tightly organised but the same sort of process goes on. From the school football match on up to the talent scout of the major clubs there is an attempt to make sure that nothing gets through the net.

But, apart from the regimentation and ideological indoctrination which are present inside sport itself it also has much wider functions. In the first place, modern sport is very much a child of the capitalist epoch. Football is a case in point.

Although there were games of 'football' at least since the middle ages they were quite different from the modern sport. They lasted many hours, involved hundreds of players on each side, had very informal rules and no referees. Modern football dates from the nineteenth century, when the rules were formulated, the size of teams etc. standardised, the clubs founded and the national and international championships set up. This sport is very much the child of industrial capitalism.

It might be thought that the Olympic games are a counter instance, since their origins are shrouded in antiquity and they took on an organised form as early as 776 BC. But these games were in origin part of a religious festival dedicated to Zeus, the athletic exercises were only part of a much wider event, and the official reward for victory was a wreath of wild olive leaves. The games were only open to a minority of the population—free males. The majority made up of women and slaves of both sexes, was excluded. In any case, the Olympics lapsed for two millenia and were only revived in 1896—the hey-day of capitalist imperialism.

There is an important similarity between Olympia in 776 BC and Moscow in 1980 AD. Ancient Greece was made up of competing city states, and the games became a contest between them. One of the results was that successful competitors gained a great deal more than the olive leaves out of victory. The states rewarded them for the prestige that they brought through their victories. That element of international competition, on the vaster scale of the modern national state, will be present in Moscow too.

In fact, modern sport is deeply embedded in international rivalry. In 1945, there was a visit to Britain by the Moscow Dynamo—according to legend, a football team made up of KGB members—which provoked George Orwell to write:

'Nearly all the sports practised nowadays are competitive. You play to win, and the game has little meaning unless you do your utmost to win... At the international level sport is frankly mimic warfare. But the significant thing is not the behaviour of the players but the attitude of the spectators: and, behind the spectators, of the nations who work themselves into furies over these absurd contests and seriously believe—at any rate for short periods—that running, jumping and kicking a ball are tests of national virtue.'

He was right. From Harold Wilson belie-

ving that Labour lost the 1970 election because England lost the World Cup through to the BBC showing Robin Cousins's Gold Medal performance about 11 times in 24 hours, international competition has turned any claims that modern sport might have as physical recreation into a disgusting farce.

'At the international level sport is frankly mimic warfare.'

George Orwell

It is also a dangerous farce. It is obvious that all this stress on national achievement, local success, club victories, has only one consequence: class collaboration. This is not only true when we participate in a sport which is run and sponsored by the class enemy but also when we watch sport.

In no other area of activity would any socialist dream of talking about supporting his or her country. Anyone who talks about 'the national interest' or eulogises the achievements of 'our boys in khaki' is clearly beyond the pale. But in sport we do identify with the myth of the nation. I have to admit that, almost every winter, I slide into gloom and despondency when 15, usually upper class, idiots are ground into the turf of Cardiff Arms Park by 15 other, rather more working class, idiots in red jerseys. And I do mean idiots, since only one player, the Welsh flanker John Taylor, has ever had the courage to break with class collaboration and refuse to tour South Africa on political grounds.

A further consequence of the mass infatuation with sport is that enormous amounts of energy and enthusiasm are diverted into channels which are absolutely harmless to capitalism. Not only does an enormous amount of working class time and ability get wasted on organising sport and participating in it but a further giant quantity gets expended on acting as a spectator. Sometimes this reaches proportions which, were it for a more worthy object, we would regard as heroic.

Consider those Scottish workers who threw up their jobs, took the Skytrain to New York, and then started to hitch-hike the length of two continents in order to watch a football team. The fact that, in so doing, they were participating in a public relations exercise for a brutal military dictatorship simply makes the waste of human potential that much more absurd.

Once again, a comparison with classical antiquity suggests itself. The Roman aristoc-

cracy maintained their rule by the savage repression of slaves and the provision of diversions for the free poor; they called it 'bread and circuses'. Sport has the same function in capitalism—to divert workers from the struggle against their real enemies. Trotsky (whose sport was hunting wolves) once wrote:

'The revolution will inevitably awaken in the English working class the most unusual passions, which have hitherto been so artificially held down and turned aside, with the aid of social training, the Church, and press, in the artificial channels of boxing, football, racing and other sports.'

There is no doubt that Trotsky was right: modern sport is nothing other than a diversion.

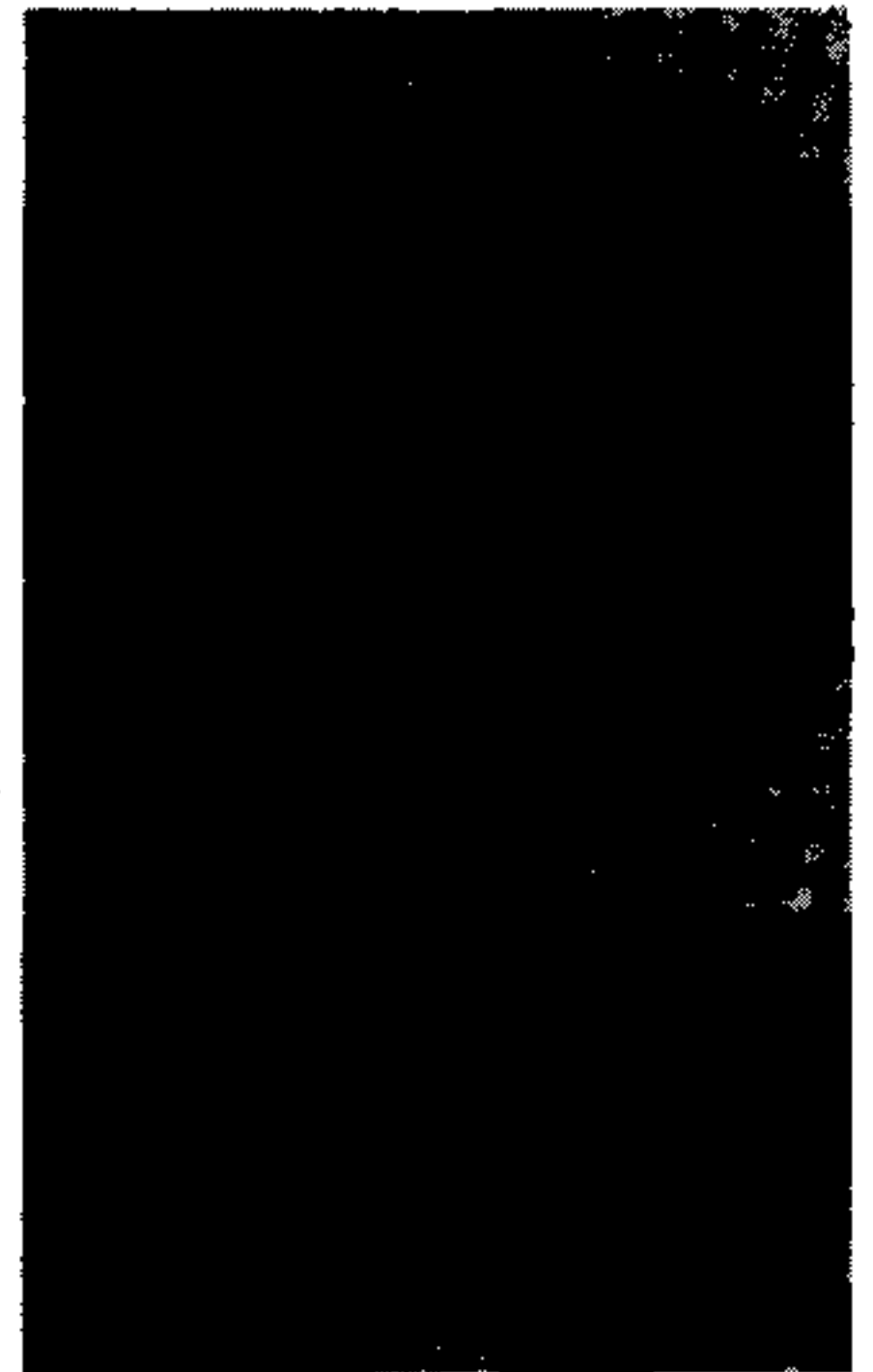
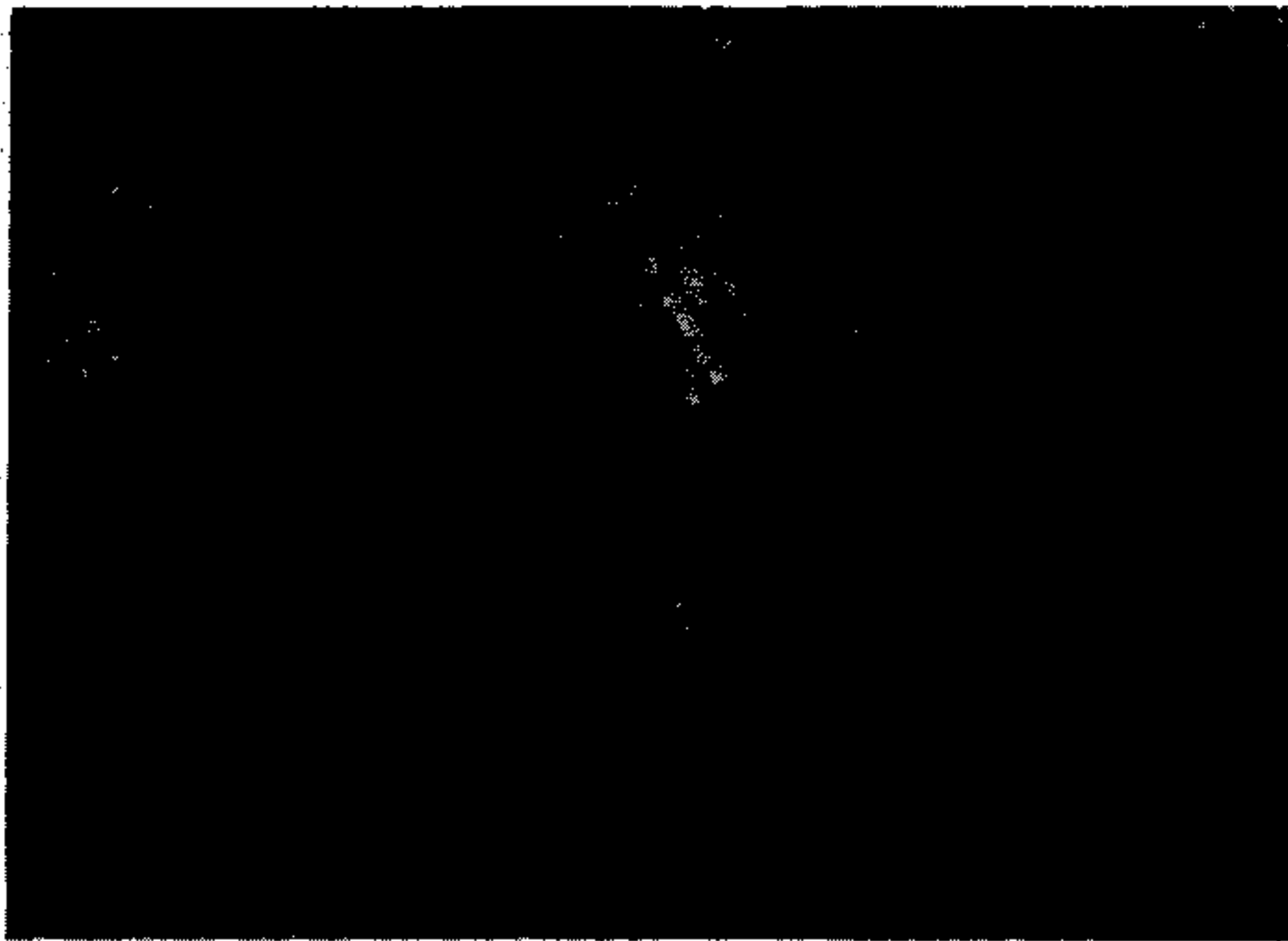
Already I can hear the angry mutters of a thousand readers as they limber up to reply. Perhaps I can anticipate some of them. One of the defences of sport will be to argue that, while all the above is true, people still enjoy it. Therefore to knock sport merely shows that the writer is nothing other than a snivelling middle-class intellectual with no sense of the life of the proletariat.

Whatever the truth there may be in the description of this writer, the argument is a dangerous one. There are lots of things which people enjoy, indeed depend upon, which are positively harmful to the revolutionary movement. I, for example, smoke heavily and enjoy it. Some members of the editorial board of this journal, on occasion, drink to excess and appear to enjoy it. But, in both cases, these drug-dependencies are very, very harmful and no-one would dream of defending them on the grounds that they are habits which are shared by millions of workers. The fact that very many workers have a fanatical enthusiasm for sport tells us only that they have adopted the bad habits of capitalism without protest.

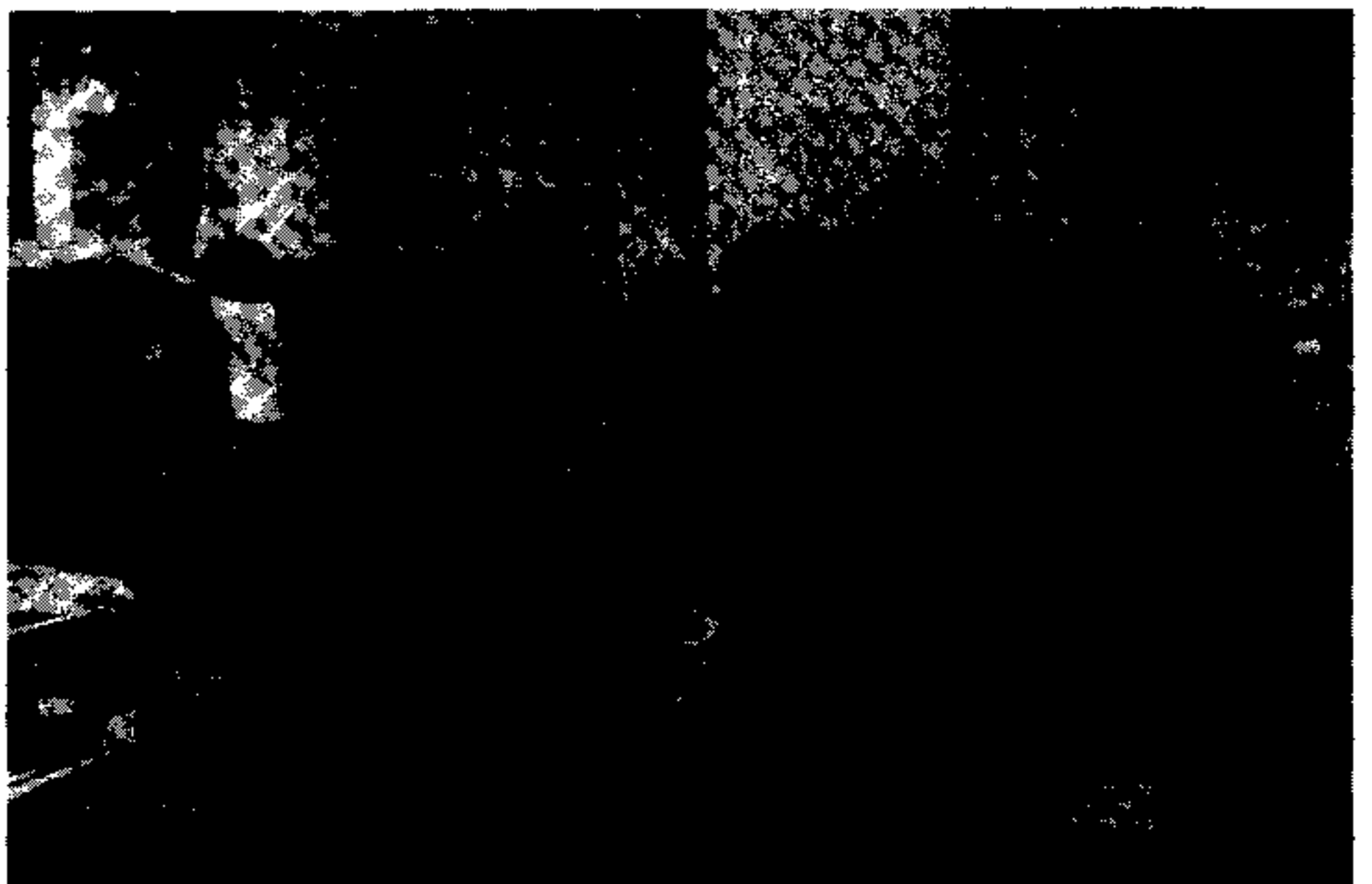
The second sort of argument will probably come from those populist intellectuals—as middle class as me—who believe that by standing in a football crowd (home matches only) they can absorb some of the characteristics of the working class: a sort of cultural osmosis which will cure their guilt. Their argument will be that, despite the distortions of capitalism, sport still represents some sort of mass working-class self-activity and thus should be granted critical support.

Now, obviously, there is some truth in this argument. There is clearly a link between the types of sports which have mass appeal and the life of the masses. The obvious example is cricket in the West Indies. In addition, sporting occasions are often the excuse for conflicts between young workers and the state. Indeed, in very repressive societies, sporting occasions can often provide the only chance for workers to meet together. Sport has often been used for other ends. In England, in 1740, for example, a ruling class writer recorded that:

'A match of Futtball was Cried at Kettering of five Hundred Men of a side, but the design was to Pull Down Lady Betty Jesamine's Mills.'



Some events Britain didn't boycott. Above: England v Germany soccer match 1938. (England in the white shirts!). Top right: Berlin Olympics 1936. Bottom right: Mexico Olympics 1968. Police shot dead 20 students.



In cases like these, sporting occasions are simply the cover for other political ends. In general however, the case is different. It is true that working class participation in sport, as players and as spectators, leaves its mark on sport. We can find traces of class consciousness in many of its aspects. But they are traces only, and the energy which is expended in sport is, at best, an inarticulate and misplaced protest against capitalism. It most certainly does not represent any sort of challenge to capitalism.

Because of this contradictory nature of working-class sport, the revolutionary movement has to make concessions to sport. That does not mean that we have to make concessions to ruling class sport and its load of nationalist, racist, sexist, and generally disgusting organisation and ideology. The Communist International set up a revolutionary sports international which organised working class men and women for sporting activities. It, and the early USSR, rejected

the Olympics as a product of imperialism and organised workers' sports festivals without nationalist competition.

But such steps are concessions, and transitory ones at that. It is my opinion that, under communism, there will be no sport. The conditions for the creation of a special category of sport are the result of the division of labour. They suppose a large class of people engaged only in sedentary labour who need physical activity as a diversion. And they suppose a specialisation of labour meaning that those who work with their bodies are not able to develop in a general way, but are forced to develop only those physical attributes which are useful for production. Socialism will abolish these conditions and allow for the free development of the human body. People might still want to kick a ball around but they will have no need for the regimentation, the arbitrary rules, the competitive element, which are what

make up sport. Under socialism there will be physical recreation but not sport as we know it.

Until that happy day, sport is a diversion when it is not an enemy. Every revolution is a great transformation of the revolutionary class itself as well as society. Instead of being content with diversion within the bounds of the given society, the revolutionary class turns its energies and thoughts to the total transformation of society. It seeks to make a new world. The working class will turn from sport to politics. The most important piece of information about sport that I know is that, in Portugal in 1974 and 1975, when the mass of workers were freed of decades of fascism and were on the verge of the struggle for power, the attendance at the matches of the football team Benfica dropped by half. Just think how much they might have dropped if the workers had entered the struggle and taken power!

Colin Sparks

An exchange of views

'If only the different bits of the left could get together...' It's a cry we hear time after time, especially from non-affiliated socialists. They are encouraged in this by the taunts of right wingers who love to joke about the multitude of varieties of revolutionary organisations. All too often, however, concrete talk of unity is not of unity in action of the whole left against the Tories, but rather of how one part of the left—albeit the biggest part of the revolutionary left—the SWP might be able to unite with a much smaller part, the International Marxist Group. We dealt briefly with the problems such an approach faces in our issue of 1980:3. For the information of readers we reprint here an exchange of letters between the IMG and the SWP that has taken place since.

Dear Comrades,

We are writing to inform you of the decisions of our national conference and the recent meeting of our Central Committee in relation to the SWP.

First, our conference voted to withdraw the resolution sent to you in July 1978 as the basis of relations between our organisations. Our conference passed a new resolution 'Why Fighting for a Joint Revolutionary Organisation with the SWP(UK) is a central task for the IMG', which has recently been published in *Socialist Challenge*.

Second, our conference affirmed our characterisation of the SWP as a revolutionary organisation, and on the basis of this decided to propose to you that the political basis exists for us to construct a joint organisation. We believe that such a political basis for a common organisation exists; and that such an organisation could act as a powerful pole of attraction to workers breaking from reformism, as well as challenging the CP as the main organisation to the left of the Labour Party. Such an organisation could have an impact far greater than the sum of its two parts.

On the basis of these conference decisions, our Central Committee decided to propose to you a joint meeting of our two leaderships to discuss this question.

We further make the following proposals for joint activity:

- * That the IMG and SWP launch a joint campaign to build a recall Defend Our Unions Conference.

- * That we organise a joint march to the TUC between the South Wales Youth March Committee and the Right to Work campaign.

- * That we discuss the possibility of fighting for the fusion of the trade union tendencies that our organisations support.

- * That our organisations fight for the fusion of *Rebel* and *Revolution*. We are sure that many areas of joint work could be

established within the framework of a fight to build a joint organisation.

We are well aware of the fact that there are many differences between us of both a tactical and programmatic character; those which we regard as central are outlined in the document passed at our conference. In particular we think the SWP should be part of the Fourth International. Nonetheless we feel that these should be debated out in a common organisation based on democratic centralism.

We remain convinced that the irresponsible splitting of the revolutionary left is an obstacle to the building of a serious alternative to reformism, and thus to winning workers to revolutionary socialism and building a revolutionary party. We therefore urge you to seriously consider the proposals that we make, and to suggest an early date for a meeting between our respective leaderships.

We look forward to a speedy reply.

Revolutionary greetings

International Marxist Group Political Committee

Dear Comrades,

I have been asked by our Central Committee to reply to your letter suggesting that our two organisations establish 'the framework of a fight to build a joint organisation.'

You state that at your conference that you agreed 'to withdraw the resolution sent to the SWP in July 1978' which, as you will recall, declared that we were a 'syndicalist break with Marxism'. This you suggest enables our two organisations to engage in joint work and discussion with an ultimate view to fusion.

As we wrote in our reply to your letter of 1978, if our two organisations were agreed over our analysis of the present situation and what had to be done it would be very wrong of us indeed not to unite our forces. However your attitude at that time made it absolutely clear that we were far from such agreement. Given your view of us you had to see it as your duty—whether or not we were formally in the framework of the same organisation—to wage a struggle to smash our leadership and our traditions, since they were likely to lead us 'to cross the class line' if it came to any large scale convulsion. We concluded that for you any talk of 'unity' could only be a manoeuvre designed to make that easier for you to do.

Have things changed as a result of the resolution that was passed at your last conference? Not if the only change to your basic perspective and orientation has been terminological, without any real shift in your analyses and practice. For, without a shift such as this, you would be forced in any joint activity or in a fused organisation to try and counter our method of work, to undermine our influence and to substitute your own.

You quite rightly remark in your latest conference resolution on 'unity', 'we are opposed to a fusion where one side calls the other "centrist"'. Such 'unity' can only mean a permanent slanging match between 'government and opposition' inside a formally united organisation. Yet two years ago when you waged an offensive over the question of unity, you did regard us as centrist. We cannot help suspecting that your basic analysis of our tradition remains the same despite your willingness to jettison the world 'centrist' itself.

The resolutions and speeches at your conference and articles in *Socialist Challenge* since have reinforced these suspicions. At your conference speakers supporting the resolution in favour of a unity approach accused their opponents (nearly half the conference) of effectively seeing us as centrist; and certainly within the opposition there was a grouping, small but closely linked to leading elements in the Fourth International, who openly call us centrist. Yet you want us to 'fight for a united organisation' including all these elements. If the unitarians in your organisation were serious about the terms of their own resolution, they would have to *break* with those people who believe that we are centrists and then approach us for unity with only those who do *not* believe that we are centrists. Otherwise they are asking us to accept precisely the kind of unity they say is undesirable.

But that is perhaps not the most important point. More significant is the fact that nothing in the analysis of your conference or of *Socialist Challenge* leads us to suppose that you have shifted your positions fundamentally on the way you judge our basic approach to the class struggle. Your conference's grudging admission that we are a 'revolutionary' and not a 'centrist' organisation was accompanied by sniping reference by speakers for *all* tendencies to our 'rank and fileism'.

A hostile tone

Even the resolution on unity insisted that our rank and file approach, 'starts from a false choice. Do we base ourselves on the activity of the rank and file or do we also include the reformist leaders? Their rank and file teachers group fetishes school based actions and unofficial strikes.....'

The tone has been maintained since in *Socialist Challenge*.

Take for instance the article by Valerie Coultas on the Great Debate in Central Hall. For Valerie, Paul Foot's argument against Benn could be summed up in the most hostile terms: 'Paul Foot echoed Hilary's (Hilary Wainwright—CH) semi-syndicalist theme of 'going where power lies' on the shop floor.'

Yet Valerie claims to be a *supporter* of unity. With supporters like that who needs splitters? We can only wonder whether being 'semi-syndicalist' we are still in Valerie's eyes a 'syndicalist break with Marxism'.

The same hostility to our basic strategy

was shown in the major article in *Socialist Challenge* on the lessons of the steel strike (by Brian Grogan, 10.4.80) Apparently, in that strike the activities of the SWP 'only detracted' from what is presented as the major task of the strike 'the building of the unofficial national strike committee' and 'support for the key militants involved'.

Note the word *only*. Nothing we did in the strike had any beneficial effect. The hundreds of thousands of leaflets, the many national and local bulletins, the fortnightly meetings of up to 40 militants from different parts of the country to discuss tactics, the work around picket lines and flying pickets, even the call for a national strike committee when it seemed a realistic prospect—it all 'only' deflected the attention from the key task. For comrade Grogan, as for those who would designate us as 'centrists', we are 'only' an obstacle in the class struggle to be got rid of as soon as possible.

But that is not all. Apparently, besides this destructive 'deflection' our comrades in steel committed another grievous sin as well. They failed to hide their identity as revolutionary socialists. Instead, week after week, in most major steel areas they made the 'mistake' of producing SWP bulletins called *Real Steel News* analysing what needed to be done from a revolutionary socialist standpoint. The result, Grogan claimed in a letter in *Socialist Challenge* a fortnight later, was the isolation of the SWP comrades from the real development of the rank and file movement. By issuing *Real Steel News* as well as taking part in the strike committee, pickets etc, we were 'trying to impose a party bulletin on the fight inside the structure of the union, most notably the strike committees. This could only undermine the development of the rank and file leadership.'

For revolutionaries to be open about the lead they offer to non-revolutionary activists (Grogan lists: 'councillors, JPs') stops the development of rank and file leadership! One begins to wonder who are the real syndicalists.

Now the IMG are entitled to their own opinion of what needs to be done and of where we go wrong. But such a fundamentally divergent view from us in a key strike as to lead you to say we only deflected people away from the major task hardly lays the basis for real unity of our organisations.

If the articles of comrades Grogan & Coultas were isolated occurrences maybe we could just let them pass. But they were not. As we have seen, they followed on from the terms of the unity resolution itself. And their points have been repeated almost word for word in articles since, for instance in an article by another 'supporter of unity' Stephen Potter in *Socialist Challenge* of 22nd May.

Like Grogan he objects to revolutionaries being open about where they stand:

'It was clearly a mistake in the steel strike to build a party front in opposition to building a national strike committee'. The hostile tone is contained in his com-

ments on an article by Tony Cliff calling for united front action against the Tories. We are told that Cliff's call for a united front approach against the Tories 'contradicted some positions adopted by the last conference of the SWP'.

The lie that the SWP was opposed to united fronts (because we refused to hide our politics inside them) was common currency from the IMG when you still described us as 'centrist' (despite the fact that year after year our conference passed resolutions on the united front—two at the last conference—and we have taken numerous actions on these). The fact that you can continue to repeat the lie again indicates that the attitude of many of your leaders to us remains unchanged.

Unity—or a slanging match?

There is another element of hostility in your attitude to our organisation to which we unfortunately have to refer. This is the way you continually repeat the lie (for instance in your unity resolution) that the 'SWP does not have a democratic internal regime'.

This must amaze the thousands of our members who, for instance, argued out differing analyses of the class struggle, the organisation of blacks and women, the structure of our organisation, before our conference last year; or who argued just as vigorously over the sort of paper we needed the year before.

Your justification for your lie is tortuous in the extreme: Steve Jefferys supported minority positions, the movers of the majority positions opposed him being elected the National Committee, and the 'rank and file' delegates overturned that opposition. The fact that the conference delegates vote down the recommendations of the leadership shows that the organisation is undemocratic!

You virtually admit in your unity resolution that what you foresee is not in reality united *action* from a single organisation, but endless arguments between our two organisations even if formally united:

'In fighting for unity with the SWP we would not dissolve the key political differences between us...' (ie your convention that we are 'semi-syndicalist')

'A polemic on our positions on the united front, the independent women's movement and so on will be conducted before, during and after fusion...'

So the 'fight for unity' will involve you arguing in the tone we've already heard from comrades Coultas, Grogan and Potter—and us presumably, replying in kind. Is this really the way forward to building an organisation that can overshadow the CP and appeal to those workers looking to the Labour Left at present? Or isn't it really a guarantee of reproducing on a larger and more disastrous scale the sectarian inward-lookingness that characterises groups such as the Spartacists, the WSL, RCG and RCT?

You go on to say, 'Public discussion on all the points that divide us would be valuable'. We wonder whether you can really believe

this. *All* the points that divide us would go right back to 1947. No doubt in some of us too there lurks a little sectarian demon that would like to recall the about turn of the Fourth International in 1948 in suddenly discovering that workers' states had been created three years before without the working class, or your claim in the mid-sixties that there was a 'workers' and peasants' government' in Algeria etc, etc, ad nauseam. But is that really the recipe for building a party rooted in the workplace?

The very fact that you can even suggest that such discussion is 'valuable' indicates to us that a good chunk of your leadership want not a united interventionist organisation, but a permanent debate in a framework which would lead us right away from the problems of the working class today. What we would end up with would be a slanging match (the tone of your articles already prove that) which would hinder the modest work that we have been doing to build a revolutionary presence in the class. We regard it as our revolutionary duty to avoid such a slanging match like the plague. Since that is what you mean by 'fighting for unity' we have to say that we can have none of it.

We say it regretfully because we know that within the IMG there are many revolutionaries who have begun to break out of the sectarian style of politics and who have begun to seriously appreciate what we are trying to build. Indeed on the basis of discussion with individuals, some of us began to feel in the run up to your conference that a reorientation on your part might open prospects for organic unity. The tone of the contributions at your conference and in your paper since have dished any such hopes. It is clear that those elements who are genuinely



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moving towards our positions only got a majority of your conference by compromising with those whose positions remain in essentials what they always were.

Political questions

At the same time the essential *political* differences between our organisations have if anything grown since your conference. This is shown not merely by your sectarian snipes about our work round the steel strike, but also by the way in which you described one of the most significant developments in the women's movement (the taking of direct action against the Corrie Bill in Parliament Square in February) as being counterproductive and also by the way in which you have slid into pro-Russian apologetics over the question of Afghanistan.

What is the common thread that underlies these differences?

We base ourselves squarely on the insistence that the 'emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself'. We regard it as substitutionist nonsense to talk of workers' states where the working class has no control over the state power, to see students, third world guerilla leaders or 'left' trade union officials as able to act in place of the working class, to identify the armed forces of the Russian state as the 'Red Army' acting as the agent of socialism, or to love up to left MPs in the abortion campaign.

The same starting point underlines our attitude to Afghanistan, over the steel strike and over the abortion campaign. You denounce our approach on all these issues as 'rank and filism' or 'semi-syndicalism'. It is this which explains your repeated insistence against all the evidence that we oppose the united front—because you cannot understand that for us the precondition for any united front activity, with MPs, union leaders or what not, is our real ability to propagate notions of independent, revolutionary, class action.

Towards a really united party

Nothing in your conference or your letter leads us to believe that these differences have diminished since your last letter of two years ago. This is unfortunate, since although we are six times your size, for us to be able to unify with other forces around a common appreciation of our tasks would make our job as revolutionaries a little easier. But that common appreciation does not exist yet and without it we will merely get continual sectarian wrangles. Under such circumstances your invitation for discussions of a 'fight for unity' is a waste of time.

We do however repeat our call of two years ago to those of your members who are beginning to appreciate what we are about: *break* with the sectarians who still see us as centrists; *break* with those who talk in the tones normally applied towards centrists; *break* with those who still see defence of the actions of the 'Red Army' as the lodestone for their world politics; *join* with us in building a party to lead working class self activity in the struggle for socialism.

Yours Fraternally,

Chris Harman

Down but not out

In 1976-77 there seemed to be a real danger that the National Front would achieve a breakthrough into national electoral politics. The NF itself expected such success. And many liberals and socialists feared that it might prove possible. As it turned out, a mass anti-fascist movement, in which our party played no small part, put paid to the prospects for the time being of such a development on the far-right of British politics. The NF were beaten on the streets at Lewisham, the Anti Nazi League Carnivals attracted thousands of young kids towards anti-racist politics, and the NF went down to humiliating electoral defeat in the 1978 local elections, and then again in the 1979 general election.

In the aftermath of the Thatcher election victory, the Front seemed to be the least of our problems. The most right-wing government since the war posed the need for anti-Toryism rather than anti-fascism. And the Front's declining and demoralised membership and its internally divided leadership could hardly be seen as any real threat.

But though the NF were certainly down, they were most certainly not out. The NF has lost much of its electoral base and also much of its 'respectable' populist membership. But there have been disturbing signs over the past few months that the Front itself in some places, and rival right-wing groups in others, are starting to recruit again, particularly from amongst young skinheads. And this new recruitment seems to be much more committed to political thuggery and much less ashamed of explicit Nazism than was the NF membership of the mid-70s.

This development hasn't occurred everywhere. There have been no real signs of it in, for example, Yorkshire outside Leeds, or North West London. And in the very special case of Glasgow, where the Front has never achieved any real success, the local NF's involvement in religious sectarianism, and in the recently formed Scottish Protestant Loyalist Association, seems to have little to do with what's going on in other parts of Britain. (The NF candidate for the June 26 Glasgow Central by-election was one of the leaders of the SPLA and his essentially sectarian campaign was disowned by the national leadership of the Front.)

But elsewhere, and in particular in areas which have relatively strong local fascist traditions, the re-emergence of aggressive, Nazi politics can be observed. In Leeds and Manchester, Walworth (South London), Waltham Forest (North East London), Newham (East London) and Hemel Hempstead, gangs of young skinheads are doing regular NF mass

paper sales.

There have been a number of reports of an increase in anti-immigrant activity. Both Birmingham and Leeds have witnessed individual attacks on West Indians and Asians. In Gorton (Manchester) one Asian family was forced out by such 'pressure'. The Lea Bridge Road Mosque in Leyton was attacked in early June, and an Asian man beaten up in Walthamstow market. Asian houses in the Adeyfield housing estate in Hemel Hempstead have been stickered by the NF (though, as yet, there have been no physical attacks). There have been a couple of petrol bombings of Asian family homes in Oldham.

The left has come under attack too. The attempted bombing of the Union Place left-wing 'resource centre' in South London in November 1979 was perhaps the most spectacular incident (spectacular both because of the scale of the planned attack — bombings are a lot heavier than punch-ups — and because of the extent of the fascists' failure, with a former chairman of the local NF branch getting sent down for six years for his part in the incident). But violence has occurred elsewhere too. Earlier this year the NF attacked a CND meeting at the YMCA in Leeds. An SWP public meeting in Brixton (South London) was smashed up by the Front late last year. A Troops Out demonstration in Birmingham in January was attacked by about 150 skinheads. Left-wing meetings (in particular Irish meetings) and left-wing newspaper sellers have been harassed in Manchester.

Not all such activity has come from the Front itself. In some areas, the British Movement has grown significantly since the general election. In Leeds, where they had only two or three members a year ago, the BM is now probably about the same size as the NF. The BM was responsible for the attack on a disco at South Bank Polytechnic in South London (although they don't seem to have any real support in that area). The BM does have a solid base, though, in parts of East and South East London (where 'The National Front is a Jewish front — gas the National Front' slogans have appeared), and there have recently been signs of its activity for the first time in North London. Although the BM is almost non-existent in Manchester itself, it has a real presence in nearby Oldham, and it was the BM which was responsible for the attack on Asian houses in Rochdale by about 40 skinheads in mid-June. BM skinheads carried out the attack on Asian owned shops in Smallheath, Birmingham, on 2 June. In fact, the BM has grown in both Birmingham and Merseyside — and so too has the recently formed British Democratic Party, which, despite its



"People who are attracted to Nazism don't mind being told they are Nazis."

original 'respectable' image, seems to have attracted some Nazi elements away from the NF.

None of this, as yet, adds up to a full-scale national renaissance for the far-right. But three things have to be noted. First, the mere fact that the NF has been thoroughly beaten once, doesn't mean that they're necessarily beaten for good. One of the most impressive local ANL victories over the NF was that at Chapel Market in Islington (North London). There were large-scale battles at Chapel Market most weekends during the summer of 1978 — which resulted in the fascists giving up even the attempt to distribute their propaganda there. In early 1979, the NF tried again to start a paper sale in the Market, and was again defeated. Since then, they've been nowhere to be seen. That is, until 7 June when a number of young NF skinheads carried out a very successful paper sale there. The following weekend they tried again and got a very rough time from the local left. They may or may not be able to re-establish a presence in Chapel Market — but the fact that they're again attempting to do so is significant in itself.

Secondly, the open Nazism of much of what's been happening recently is also significant. Writing in this *Review* in the immediate aftermath of the 1978 local elections, Colin Sparks predicted that

'Tyndall and Co will now face pressure to present themselves as more clearly a fascist alternative or risk losing some of their cadre to the more openly Nazi groups. The hardened Nazis in the NF have been able to resist the temptation to put on the jack-boots as long as they could get votes, but now that line seems to be petering out, they will

need something to keep their spirits up.'

That prediction has proven remarkably accurate, especially since the NF's general election debacle. In some areas, such as Leeds, the NF seem to have lost out to more extremist groups like the BM. In others (and also actually in Leeds itself) the NF has become more openly Nazi. In Hemel Hempstead, for example, the local Young National Front, who openly refer to themselves as the Hitler Youth, and go in for regular swastika daubing, broke into a local youth club and held a Hitler's birthday party. Quite obviously, this means that propaganda exposing the NF as essentially a Nazi organisation is unlikely to have much effect on many of the Front's more recent recruits. People who are attracted to Nazism don't mind being told they're Nazis.

And thirdly, the fact that the far-right is recruiting from amongst young kids, and particularly skinheads, is significant too. The ANL achieved real success in attracting kids towards anti-racist politics. But over the last year or more the anti-racist movement has been losing out. Reports have come in from North East London, for example, that former supporters of School Kids Against the Nazis are now hanging around with NF skins. This means that socialists are going to have to take the whole business of agitating amongst young kids a great deal more seriously than in the recent past.

There are two possible, mistaken responses to these developments. One is to assume that the increased violence etc is *merely* a sign of weakness, and that as a result we don't really have anything to worry about. In some areas (Manchester, perhaps) this might well be

the case. But in others there is no doubt that the far-right is recruiting people on the basis of precisely this type of political violence. The other is to panic ourselves into believing that we're faced with an all-out fascist offensive. We're not. At a time when *Spearhead* can run an article on '*Why the Left is Going to Win*', that just can't be the case.

What seems to be happening is this. In some areas, the fascists are re-emerging from the woodwork and are becoming much more visibly aggressive and much more openly Nazi. In areas where this is happening socialists are going to have to continue to take the whole business of security very seriously. Public meetings are going to have to be properly stewarded, and paper sales carried out in groups, rather than by individuals wherever trouble is at all likely. More importantly, more work is going to have to be put into the ANL wherever fascist activity has once again become evident. We're going to have to get back to the ANL contact lists, and we're going to have to be both ready and able to mobilise the ANL whenever and wherever the fascist menace looks at all serious.

In his article on the 1978 local elections, Colin Sparks wrote:

'There will undoubtedly be a temptation among some sections of the labour movement to downgrade anti-NF work in the future. This will be justified in terms of having beaten them. Nothing could be more disastrous. Not only is the pool of racialism still present, even if it is now voting Tory, but the anger and frustration which gives rise to the Nazis is very far from removed. We are in for a long, hard struggle.'

We are indeed.

Andrew Milner

Sectarian distortion

Rick Cole's article on the NUS national conference (SR 1980:5) was a tragic illustration of how sectarianism can distort one's analysis of political events. Why, he asks, did the Socialist Students Alliance get three candidates elected to the National Executive compared to SWSO's two. Simple, he answers, a vote for SWSO represented a 'definite commitment to revolutionary politics' whilst a vote for the SSA was a vote for 'blurred politics'.

This haughty rejoinder falls flat however since Rick fails to cite one example of where these 'blurred politics' were evident. Not, it appears, in the policy debates since in only one out of seven (Afghanistan) did SWSO have a distinctive position. Not, it appears, in our intervention over Ireland since, although Rick fails to mention it, we collaborated on guest speakers, jointly organised the fringe meeting, supported and participated in the unofficial collection and wrote the policy on Armagh that he refers to. Perhaps then it was when one of our candidates proclaimed her support for the Provisional IRA or when another spoke on behalf of the St. Pauls, Bristol Defence Fund?

Of course our success could be due to other factors. Like the role that SSA militants have played in local campaigns on overseas students, cuts, autonomy, the Corrie Bill, in raising the issues of Armagh and supporting the steel strike. Or the fact that we never subordinate organising students on the key issues raised in these campaigns to party building. Rather we argue that the best way to attract revolutionaries to our organisation is by demonstrating in practice that we have a line that meets the needs of the mass of students.

But Rick isn't interested in these factors. Instead he distorts the real record of our joint work on Ireland and offers succour to the SWSO membership. This attitude is more than unfortunate. Today, with the attacks of the Tories mounting, thousands of students are looking for answers. It's our task to win them to socialist politics and to unity with the working class. Greater collaboration between our respective organisations and a clear and honest debate over the real obstacles to achieving it can only aid that process.

Mick Archer,
SSA National Committee and IMG.

It's not that easy

The argument of Colin Sparks' 'Getting away with it' seems to be that militancy and efficient organisation are the keys to victory in any workers' struggle. In particular he mentions: a determination to stick it out, a willingness to act independently of the trade union bureaucracy, mass involvement, attempts to win support from other workers, no return to work until the issue at stake is settled.

I think this analysis likely to contribute to complacency among militants if taken seriously. What simply does not figure in Colin's analysis is the simple fact that the class struggle is a two-sided affair. Victory for the workers does not just depend on their own actions. It also depends on what the employers are doing.

Unfortunately, the two examples of workers' victories quoted in Colin's article are both in wartime, when it was absolutely vital for the employers to keep production going. Consequently the employers were quick to meet the workers' demands. In Britain today, employers are increasingly willing to confront workers' power in extended strikes—the steel strike was an obvious example.

The other point is that in wartime there was full employment in Britain, and colossal profits were made by the capitalist class. No worker on strike feared bankrupting the firm and throwing himself or herself out of a job. This is a very real fear among British workers today—since British capitalism is genuinely in deep crisis, the threat of the dole has had the effect of restricting workers' militancy.

While it is true that workers on strike in Kent in 1941 could obviously be pressured by accusations of lack of patriotism and assisting the Nazi enemy, on the whole workers in struggle face far more problems now than they did in either war. We are up against a militant, organised, and determined ruling class whose ideology holds sway over masses of workers. To combat that class, we need more than militancy and organisation. We need Politics—revolutionary socialist politics, the only politics that can show a way out of the impasse and provide an alternative to the arguments of 'save the firm', 'save Britain' etc. We neglect this vital element at our peril.

Brian J. Martin
Grantham

Sensible pragmatism

In reply to Ian Birchall's letter to SR 1980: 6 concerning trades councils, I would like to refute the charge of 'world-weary abstentionism' by providing a bit more information about our experience on the trades council.

Being heavily dominated by the Leyland unions, it reflects the tensions both amongst the individuals who were involved in the various phases of unionisation of the plant, and also the political organisations involved in the work (primarily SLL, WRP, and CP). Consequently, not only is the council bureaucratic, it is also coloured by personal and political sectarianism.

When we were in a position of having several delegates on the trades council, we were active in the direction that Ian suggests, but our experiences were far from good. We were clearly identified with the orthodox Trotskyists who were repellant to

the majority of delegates and this, in turn, damaged our credibility. Secondly, because of the nature of the existing trades council 'work', we were increasingly involved in bureaucratic, and time-consuming activities which reduced our contact with delegates and impaired our ability to move them into activity.

Given these facts, we pursued not a policy of 'world weary abstentionism' but a policy of 'sensible pragmatism' whereby we tried to involve the delegates outside the arena of the council. Here we had some success. We involved people in the Right to Work societies, we had considerable success in drawing people into the ANL, and our contacts were and credibility improved.

Our experience highlights the fact that in some circumstances, fighting for the object is a good response, whereas in others it is not. We were very conscious of the requirements of such a fight, and we were right to regard such a fight as being counter-productive.

The object of the exercise is to view these positions in terms of the contribution which can be made to rank and file organisation and activity. Anyone who has been a branch secretary will know the feeling of paranoia as the mounds of minutes, correspondence, reports, junk, have to be digested ready for an endless series of meetings. Whilst branch secretaryship can be very useful, we have to make sure that the shit-work is leading somewhere.

While accepting Ian's point in principle, I would plead for close attention to local details. Other than that, I agree with what he has said.

Bob Lloyd,
Oxford.

NO answer to the press gang

Aidan White's two articles in the latest issue of Socialist Review on the Campaign for Press Freedom and the launching of the *East End News* were very timely.

On some issues I think Aidan is just far too optimistic, and on others he's downright wrong.

One of the problems is that *everyone* is in favour of press freedom.

The real question is about control of editorial policy. If the trade union leaderships really wanted a daily Labour paper they would have got one going years ago. But they know that as soon as you set one up there are problems. How would a paper financed by the unions have dealt with the Chix settlement? How would a paper financed by both the AUEW and the GMWU have discussed the lagers dispute? Will the *East End News*, sponsored by the local Labour MP's and Trade Union leaders, explain that a major reason for the growth of the NF in East London is that Labour has controlled the area for years, that the political bankruptcy of the Labour Party has discredited socialism, that the lefty Jack Jones sold the dockers down the river?

The issue raised by socialists when they explain the nature of the Fleet Street press is that 'he who pays the piper, calls the tune'.

Surely that would also be the case if the current trade union leaders funded the Labour press. Look at the way so many unions are prepared to finance large advertising space from time to time in the *Morning Star* and *Tribune*. They do so because both of those papers are safe. Remember the heading of an article in the *Morning Star* when Derek Robinson was sacked at the same time as the BL pay negotiations were on? It read, 'Robbo Row Sours BL Pay Talks'.

Another assumption behind the press freedom discussion is that a hard hitting socialist paper would draw tens of thousands away from the Fleet Street tabloids. Is this really true, putting on one side the view that a paper financed by the official movement would neither be hard hitting nor socialist, given that those currently producing hard hitting socialist papers find that circulation beyond thirty thousand or so is extremely difficult?

While Aidan reports that speaker after speaker at the Campaign for Press Freedom conference emphasised the need for direct action to challenge editorial policy, little has emerged from the Campaign about how this is to be done. Action by printworkers and journalists in recent years has been effective in stopping racist filth from getting into print on a number of local newspapers, but we've got a long way to go to make this a common practice. I'm a bit worried that setting up alternative newspapers on a grandiose or even a small scale can be a diversion from the hard, but potentially fruitful, fight to win media workers in print, radio and TV to take industrial action to challenge the right of employers to publish or transmit whatever they want.

John Robins, Central London

Start from the movement

We are writing as members of the Gay Teachers group to protest at the inaccuracy of the Gay Rights at Work report in your April/May issue and the total misrepresentation of the work and position of the gay teachers present at that conference.

First we were not disputing the need for backing from 'rank and file' groups for gay rights motions—how could we be when we have liaised with rank and file groups ever since the John Warburton victimisation in 1975? Indeed one of the signatories of this letter is in *Rank and File*, another teacher at the conference was a member of the SWP and another a member of the IMG.

We do believe in the need for a militant trade union movement as one area of the struggle for socialism, but unlike the SWP gay group (the writer of the report) we believe that the foundation for a successful gay rights at work campaign has to be the gay movement. We are as yet unaware of any left group, unless lesbians or gay men have been in it, who have ever started a gay group, or worked out policies on gay rights. That understanding of the need for the gay movement was missing from the conference and missing from the report. It was also the

reason for our 'suspicion' and 'hostility' which was not 'expressed mainly by teachers.' Otherwise how can the SWP gay group explain why only 30 people voted for the motion they supported, 26 people voted for a motion we put and 8 people abstained. There were at the most 6 gay teachers present at the vote?

Peter Bradley,
Alan Jackson
Nigel Young

Dangerous game

I think that Socialist Review has improved a lot in the last year or so, but the last issue showed some nasty traits of sectarianism and egoism.

Why is the campaign for re-selection of MPs like trying 'to dry a swamp by throwing in handfuls of dry earth' as Ian Birchall claims? We have to argue why parliament does not have power in this society, not just dismiss attempts to control our representatives which I hope, would be used and extended under socialism.

I think it is very dangerous to play the numbers game when talking about the Communist Party as Gareth Jenkins did. A drop in the size of the CP is surely a loss to the left in this country especially if it meant the demise of the *Morning Star*.

Until the SWP can seriously replace the CP as 'the focus for left wing industrial activity', losses and mistakes by the CP will be defeat for us all.

Andy Wynne
St Annes

Muggins mugged?

I should like to say something about Roland Muldoon's comments in the June/July issue of *Socialist Review*. I feel that the best way to do this is to turn the tables on Roland and use his style and language from *Full Confessions of a Socialist*. I don't intend to be offensive but I must say...

'I fucking well hate Roland Muldoon! I call him 'Roland Balloon' and I hate him and after this, he's probably going to fucking well hate me.

'And the fucking reason I hate him is that he's too bleeding cocky and patronises his bleeding audiences. And now he's got this bleeding high faluting crap in *Socialist Review* to 'explain' his fucking self.

'I tell you fucking well what, the next time I see him, I'm going to say:

'You're that famous archtypical three dimensional flow of fucking consciousness a la Lenny Bruce—so beloved by the working class, Roland Balloon...and I claim my £5 prize.

'A la Lenny Bruce! Fuck me!

'Lenny Bruce, mate, was outrageous for what he said...not the fucking way he said it.

'And what's more, he fucking well played himself, mate, and when he cracked a joke, he took the bleeding rap for it himself.

'I mean, Muldoon thinks that he can play a guy who says the most revolting crap about his wife...which people in the fucking audience laugh at...and then get off the

bleeding hook by saying, 'It's not me saying these things, it's a fucking character and anyway he fucking well sees the error of his ways later in the play.'

'By the same bleeding logic, he could play a fucking Nazi pouring out anti-Jewish filth...which some people would fucking laugh at. Then Muldoon would say, it's alright...it's just a character and he becomes a fucking socialist later in the play.

'But he wouldn't get away with that. Socialists wouldn't stand people in the fucking audience laughing at anti-Jewish jokes, no matter what the so-called fucking higher values of the play.

'I mean, 6,000,000 dead, you have to be a bit bleeding sensitive about that. But women, ...well, that's a bit fucking different, isn't it?

'Another thing about Lenny Bruce. He, mate, was loved by his audiences and attacked by the authorities...

'Don't get me wrong about one thing. It's not Muldoon's style I hate.

'I mean, fuck it, it fucking well does get a bit fucking repetitive but the *idea* of a stand up comic in socialist theatre is good.

'It's the content, what he bloody well says, that's crap. So when he fucking well comes down to Earth, and stops thinking that he really is the new Lenny Bruce, and when he gets some new plays which *at least* don't offend other radical viewpoints, he'll be a fucking credit to the movement.

'At present, he's a fucking disgrace!'

Steve Faith,
Edinburgh.

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Our heritage

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While a socialist revolution takes place initially in a single country, it cannot survive except as part of a world revolution. If workers were to take power in Britain tomorrow but *not* in others, they would face the very real constant threat of attack from other capitalist states—whether by the application of trade embargoes or by direct military intervention.

The only way in which a socialist Britain could effectively survive and workers hold on to state power is if it could be spread to *other* countries. And by the organisation of solidarity with the newly born workers' state.

The example of Russia is rich with experience. After workers took power in Petrograd in 1917 Lenin and the Bolsheviks repeatedly argued that the Russian Revolution was only the beginning of world revolution and that the fate of Soviet Russia would be largely determined by what happened elsewhere.

That such a perspective was realistic at that time can be gleaned from the following account of the situation given by the Communist International in 1921:

'In November 1917 the Russian proletariat conquers state power. In November 1918, the downfall of the German and Austro-Hungarian monarchies. The strike movement sweeps over a number

of European countries, constantly gaining scope and intensity in the course of the succeeding year.'

'Towards the close of that year the United States is convulsed by turbulent strikes of steel workers, coal miners and railwaymen. In Germany, following the January and March battles of 1919, the movement reaches its apogee shortly after the Kapp putsch in March 1920.'

'In France the tensest moment in the internal situation occurs in May 1920. In Italy the movement of the industrial and rural proletariat grows incessantly and leads in September 1920 to the seizure of factories, mills and landed estates by the workers. In December 1920 proletarian mass strikes take place in Czechoslovakia. In March 1921, the uprisings of workers in Central Germany and the coal miners' strike in England.'

As one of the Bolshevik leaders and first president of the Communist International, Zinoviev, wrote in 1920:

'Decisive struggles confront the world proletariat. We are living through an epoch of open civil wars. The crucial hour is at hand. In almost all countries where there is a workers' movement of any size, the immediate future holds out for the working class a number of fierce armed conflicts.'

Such words were not written lightly. The role of socialist *organisation* and *leadership* of such movements was crucial.

Before 1914 the Socialist parties had been organised in the Second International whose aim was international working class

solidarity. Yet when the First World War erupted these socialist organisations fell over themselves in an effort to back their respective government war efforts.

In most of the major countries in the advanced capitalist world the movement split between the 'social-patriots' and the internationalists, those socialists opposed to the war who met at conferences in Zimmerwald and Kienthal to co-ordinate their efforts.

However the impetus for the formation of a new international socialist *organisation*—linking together the various anti-war and socialist groups—came only after the Bolsheviks had taken state power in Russia. A new Third (Communist) International was proclaimed in March 1919.

The Communist International was Lenin's conception of a revolutionary party for the overthrow of capitalism—expanded to a world scale. To put such an operation into effect it became necessary to assist the development and rapid growth of revolutionary socialist parties in as many countries as possible. The Comintern had to draw together the various strands and fragments of revolutionaries into newly formed and hastily dubbed 'Communist Parties'.

The most important difference between the discredited Second International and the new Communist model—besides its politics—was that the Comintern was to be strictly *centralised*. The Statutes of the Comintern read:

'The Communist International must, in fact and deed, be the single communist party of the entire world. The parties working in the various countries are but its separate sections.'

The supreme authority was to be held in a World Congress which would meet every year with an elected Executive Committee organising the day to day activity—vested with enormous power.

In a period of mass struggles and upheavals each country was directly affected by what happened in others. A highly centralised International was absolutely necessary in such circumstances.

At the same time the Comintern was highly *democratic*. The major issues that confronted the movement—work in the trade unions, relationship to the social democratic and 'centrist' organisations, participation in parliamentary elections, role of a communist party in revolution, the agrarian question, and the colonial and national questions—were thrashed out in debate and discussion. The direct experiences of the numerous parties rooted in struggle were reflected in the decisions adopted.

The Communist International—which had begun from humble beginnings—was to transform itself into a huge and powerful organisation. Mass parties were attracted to affiliate to the Comintern in all the major countries of the world.

Yet almost ironically, as the Comintern was being built, the revolutionary struggles of the period immediately following the war period began to subside. And the International was to come under pressure from parties who had formally joined the Comintern but

were not *revolutionary* organisations, but rather which stood in the 'centre' between reformists and revolutionaries. In these parties reformist leaders often obstructed the adoption of genuine revolutionary tactics. Nevertheless it was necessary for the Comintern to relate to such 'centrist' organisations in an attempt to influence their mass membership.

At the same time sections of the newly formed Communist Parties displayed strong 'ultra-left' tendencies in their attempts to side-step some of the obstacles in the path to revolution.

To integrate such massive and divergent forces in a period of mass social upheaval proved to be a formidable task. The *Theses and Resolutions of the First Four Congresses of the Communist International*—held between 1919 and 1922—help illustrate the immense problems that had to be faced. Many of the documents contained in this book have never been available in English before, or presented in one compact volume. They are absolutely fascinating and remain an invaluable guide to revolutionary politics for today. They constitute a major enrichment of Marxism and an essential guide to revolutionary strategy and tactics.

Of course, readers of the book must always remember at the back of their minds the *particular* conditions and circumstances that surrounded the formulation of such documents—before swallowing wholesale their entire contents. And it is instructive to be aware of the enormous gap that existed between many of the decisions taken in the first four Congresses and the actual policies adopted by the various organisations.

The Bolshevik party had received long training and gained a wealth of experience in the many years of its growth leading to the seizure of state power. Direct experience was crucial for the development of a self-confident and tested leadership. Yet a tremendous obstacle to transferring this revolutionary experience was the deep reformist tradition in the countries of Central and Western Europe. And as the Russian workers state degenerated due to foreign intervention and the failure of revolutions abroad the Comintern was to inevitably become distorted in the process.

Nevertheless the first four Congresses of the Third International represent the best living example of the revolutionary socialist tradition which the Socialist Workers Party would place itself within.

For example the role of revolutionary agitation in the army:

'As regards propaganda in the armies and navies of the capitalist states appropriate methods must be sought for each separate country. Anti-militaristic agitation of the pacifist variety is extremely harmful. It only assists the bourgeoisie to disarm the proletariat'

'The proletariat opposes on principle all military organisations of the bourgeois state and of the bourgeois class and fights consistently against their influence.'

'Nevertheless these institutions (army, rifle clubs, territorials, etc) can be used to further the military training of the wor-

kers in preparation for the revolutionary struggle. This means that intensive agitation must be directed not against the principle of military training for young people and workers, but against the military regime and the autocratic rule of the officers.'

'Every opportunity of getting weapons into the hands of the proletariat must be exploited as vigorously as possible. The rank and file must be made aware of the class antagonisms underlying the material privileges of the officers, the insecure social position of the ordinary soldiers and the rough treatment meted out to the rank and file.'

We have not *quite* reached this stage in Britain as yet, but the Comintern documents provide some food for thought about how revolutionaries go about cracking the power and might of the armed forces. The Resolution on work among women also contains some very explicit and interesting advice.

'The Third Congress of the Communist International once again draws the attention of all women to the fact that without Communist Party support for all the projects leading to the liberation of women, the recognition of women's rights as equal human beings and their real emancipation cannot in practice be won'.

... It follows that the Communist Parties must extend their influence over the widest layers of the female population by means of organising special apparatuses inside the party and establishing special methods of approaching women, with the aim of liberating them from the influence of the bourgeois world-view and the influence of the compromising parties, and of educating them to be resolute fighters for Communism and consequently for the full development of women.

... The Third Congress of the Communist International is firmly opposed to any kind of separate women's organisations in the parties or trade unions or special women's organisations, but it accepts that special methods of work among women are necessary and that

every Communist Party should set up a special apparatus for this work.'

One may well disagree with the conclusions taken by the Comintern on the question of organising amongst women—but we certainly cannot ignore them.

Finally, the Comintern decisions also deal with how a Communist Party should organise its propaganda and agitation:

'Communist agitation among the proletarian masses must be conducted in such a way that the militant proletariat recognises that our Communist organisation is both courageous and far-sighted, and a loyal and energetic leader of the workers' movement.'

'To win this recognition the Communists must take part in *all* the day-to-day struggles and all the movements of the working class, and defend the workers in every clash with the capitalists over the length of the working day, wages, conditions of work, etc.

'It is only by means of such day-to-day grass-roots work and by constant and full commitment to participation in all the struggles of the proletariat that the party can become a truly *Communist* party.'

'Only in this way will it mark itself off from the obsolete socialist parties whose activity is confined to abstract propaganda, recruiting work, talking about reforms and exploiting the "possibilities" of parliament.

'Communists make a *grave mistake* if they stand back *passively*, are scornful of or oppose the day-to-day struggle of the workers for small improvements in the conditions of their lives on the grounds that they have a Communist Programme and that their final goal is armed revolutionary struggle.'

This book is well worth reading—alongside background material of the actual history of the circumstances prevailing at the time. However you will have to order it from the library as the price obviously does not give socialists easy access to such a collection of invaluable documents.

Ralph Darlington

What it is and how to fight it

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The economic crisis is out of control. In Britain 3½ million are out of work, inflation has rocketed to over 80 per cent, wiping out small businesses and pensions. The government is trapped between big business on the one hand, demanding further wage controls and tougher anti-union laws, and, on the other hand, the working class desperately trying to defend living standards. The unions are paralysed by years of anti-union legislation and a hopeless reformist leadership. Many of the defensive strikes against

closures have been broken by the police or, in more backward areas, by gangs of armed fascists.

Suddenly, big business tires of the parliamentary device of holding on to power. They invest massively in the fascist alternative and society shifts from declining capitalism to barbarism. Within a few weeks of political stage management fascism is in control. The unions are outlawed, the left is liquidated, social minorities are compulsory registered and the one party state is installed as a life raft for capitalism.

This scenario lurks at the back of every socialist's mind. The horror of Nazism and barbarities of Auschwitz are more a part of our sub-conscious than the H-bomb. As capitalism moves into deeper crisis we tend

Out of the economic crisis, unemployment and deprivation of the 1920s and 1930s, fascism brought the Second World War and the death camps of Nazi Germany. Faced with such horror, we are tempted to see it as a blind and elemental force, sweeping along with the destruction of humanity as its sign. Today, as another economic crisis deepens, fascism rises its head again.

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COLIN SPARKS

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BOOKMARKS

to see fascism more as an inevitability than an horrific possibility.

This long-overdue book by Colin Sparks nails this myth. And in so doing it nails many other myths—the myths of nationalism and race. But more importantly it nails the myth that, opposed to all other movements, fascism is the movement of *action*. The fascist movements of Hitler and Mussolini could only take control of their respective state machines with the permission and sponsorship of big business. Prior to then the mass support of fascism was no more than a stage army, riddled with conflicts and contradictions, drawn from the most despairing and reactionary section of every class and kept marking time in the political wing until summoned to give the appearance of overwhelming popular support for the new order.

The book is clearly divided into eight sections dealing with the various aspects of fascism: its weaknesses, its pre-conditions, its class base, the German, Italian and Spanish experiences and an extensive examination of the struggle in Britain, fascism today and how it can be stopped.

Although this book will (and should) become a manual for struggle in the years ahead, there is one problem that it really doesn't tackle. It is undoubtedly true that the National Front, like all other previous Nazi organisations, attempts to create a mass movement dedicated to the preservation of capitalism, its social discipline and the strengthening of its state.

But what is it that draws youngsters from the working class into its ranks? Clearly it must be the alienation and sustained violence of capitalist society: in effect, the subculture of the National Front is a deflected class consciousness. Nazi organisations give their supporters an illusion of power through street brawls, football hooliganism and cowardly attacks against minorities that do nothing to challenge the existing system. Therefore an essential part of the struggle

against fascism is the ability of socialists to win over potential defectors to our side. That is, by the optimism of our ideas and real action—strikes, mass demonstrations—aimed at achieving a decent society.

Colin's book covers an enormous breadth of issues, from Mussolini to military coups, from Hitler's Nazi Party to the National Front. As it says on the cover, it's about *How* and *Why* we must stop fascism.

The publishing of the book was made possible by the donations of close friends of and fellow CPSA members of Ossie Lewis—a life-long fighter against fascism who tragically lost his last fight against cancer in September 1978. For Ossie, for other fighters against fascism, for its millions of victims and for the future generations who *will* inherit a free, beautiful and socialist world, our slogan must remain 'NEVER AGAIN'.
Brian Parkin

The story of the strike

Two pamphlets about the steel industry have just been published. One comes from the Communist Party, the other from *Real Steel News*, the SWP's highly successful steel bulletin.

The Communist Party's pamphlet is a very strange product indeed. After a close reading I can't find a single reference, not even in passing, to the steel strike; the first three months of this year just isn't mentioned. Instead there is a general analysis of the run down of the British Steel Corporation in the last 10 years and a call for an expansion of the economy to increase the domestic demand for steel, together with selective import controls to protect the domestic market from foreign competition.

But about the strike—nothing. The centre-piece of the pamphlet is about how the BSC could be run under the CP's Alternative Economic Strategy. Someone has obviously been to a great deal of trouble to work out a blueprint for what the pamphlet calls 'a single management board accountable both to the workers in industry and to Parliament.' Each of the 'four constituent parts' of the board is discussed. It is to be made up of representatives of the workforce, of the TUC, of local community groups (eg Councils we are told), and 'Government appointed representatives.'

Nowhere does the pamphlet deal with how to achieve this amazing construction. Nowhere does it deal with the sort of policies that might be needed to fight the 52,000 redundancies that BSC is now carrying out. In fact just as the CP's pamphlet was published BSC announced that local agreements had been signed at Llanwern and Port Talbot accepting 11,500 redundancies.

Just three months ago those same workers who tamely accepted 12,500 redundancies were organising highly effective mass pickets and organising their strike in spite of the efforts of their own union leaders to control what was happening. Now Bill Sirs is able to say that he wanted to fight at Llanwern and Port Talbot, but no one would follow.

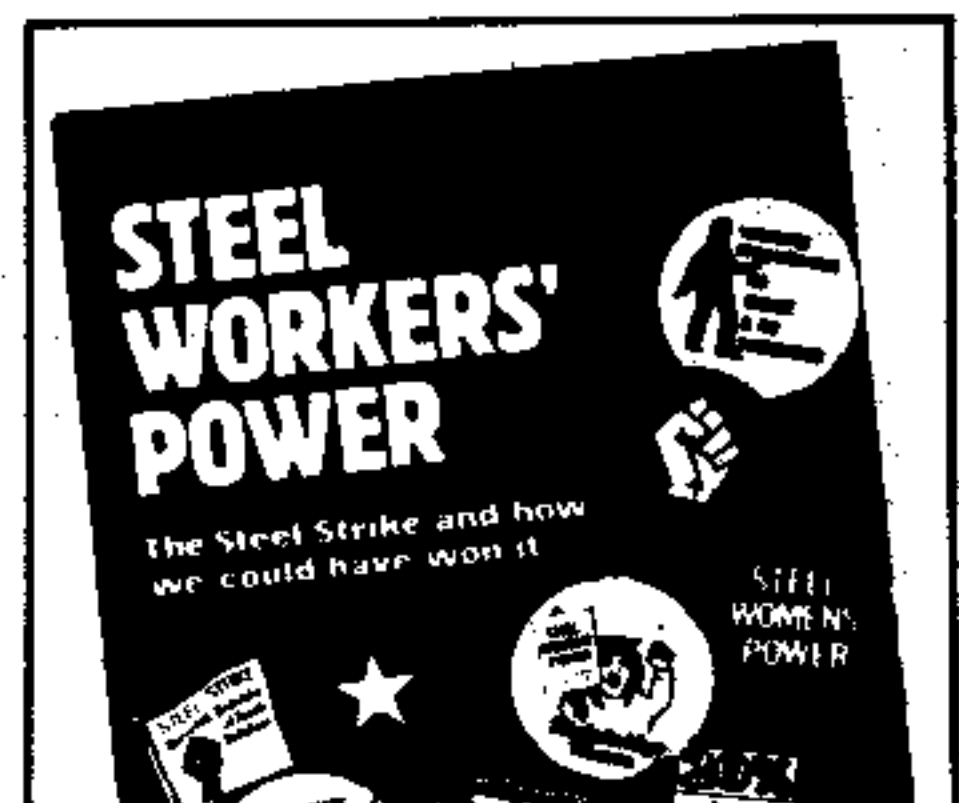
In this desperate situation the CP's pamphlet represents the worst sort of despair. The steel strike is not mentioned, instead a series of policies are put forward all of which require going to the House of Commons and asking for them to do something. Nowhere does the pamphlet suggest that the workers in the steel industry showed in the strike that they have the power to

fight. Nowhere does the CP pamphlet discuss why they aren't fighting and how we can begin to build towards such a fight. Instead the policies they put forward are the policies of those who have lost confidence in the capacity of the steelworkers to fight.

The *Real Steel News* pamphlet is a complete contrast. It discusses what the lessons of the strike mean for us now in the fight to defend the jobs. The central problem is shop floor organisation and political confidence in each individual plant. There's no point asking the MPs to do something if the workers won't fight or don't have the confidence to fight. Equally there's not much point in setting up national committees to fight the closures if the mass of workers don't have confidence in their own strength.

The task in the steel industry is to rebuild shop floor organisation. This requires hard politics as well as a willingness to take on the local plant managements on every small issue that crops up. If the only way to defend trade union organisation at BSC is to cause a fuss and try and gain a small victory over the toilet paper, then that is where we have to fight. The sort of policies that are needed are argued for in the *Real Steel News* pamphlet and summed up in the *Real Steel News* Steelworkers Charter.

Pete Clark



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All our yesterdays

The Wanderers

Director: Philip Kaufman

The casual *Socialist Review* movie-goer may well get the impression from the title and the poster that *The Wanderers* is some second rate imitation of *The Warriors*. And given that you probably wasted a couple of quid and an evening on *The Warriors* finding out that the notorious cinema riots must have been confined to some creative publicity department (you get more menace and machismo on a train to Dagenham East any night) you'll probably feel like giving *The Wanderers* a miss.

You would, however, be wrong. In fact *The Wanderers* is the latest in the stable of Look-Back-With-Tears-and-Laughter-American-Youth-Pics (or, in scientific jargon, LBWTALAYPs).

Now the LBWTALAYP is not to be confused with the films that were made for youth: horrors like *Gidget goes Hawaiian* which were so thoroughly mediocre that they have not yet even got a cult following. (and that is pretty mediocre.)

Rather they are *about* youth, celebrating its culture and its vitality, but also, ever so gently, documenting its traumas on the road to the grim world of American adulthood. And so they are, at one and the same time, funny, nostalgic, exciting and, ever so slightly, subversive.

The LBWTALAYP has included in its stable a high proportion of very good movies. It began with *Summer of Forty Two*. Call this, "the story of sexual awakening in small town America set against the backdrop of the carnage of the Pacific War" and you are likely to permanently empty the cinema. But that's what it is and very good it is too.

It then got into the early sixties with a new war to grow up into and die in—and, of course, some marvellous sound tracks.

Doo-wop went on film with some amazing results. Like the bitter sweet *American Graffiti* and the just plain bitter *Mean Streets*. And more recently there has been a very funny middle class variant, *National Lampoon's Animal House*, and the even funnier, and very working class, *Breaking Away*.

The Wanderers follows on from these. And it doesn't let the side down.

It does borrow a bit from *The Warriors*: gang warfare turned into fairy tale. It does it a lot better: there's an ultra cool Chinese mob who just stand around for most of the film saying, "Don't fuck with the Wongs" so convincingly that when they do go into action the audience breaks into spontaneous applause.

But in the main it's straight LBWTALAYP. The horribly serious interplay between youthful and adult Italian machismo like in *Mean Streets*. The wildly funny scenes

of adult misunderstanding, like when a liberal teacher starts a class-room gang war with his progressive (and desperate) informal method of teaching about Abraham Lincoln. Some inspired use of music, like the black football team and their entourage high stepping it onto the pitch to the strains of the Isley Brothers' "Shout". And of course there's the Kennedy assassination, drunken enlistment in the marines and a shot gun wedding to muddy your dreams.

Its good stuff. A bit awkwardly put together, but with alot of gems.

Perhaps I liked it because it filled in some gaps in a youth I never had. But then few of us can have had enough of one not to need a bit of that. And all of us are sufficiently familiar with the symbols, from Dion to Dylan, to get at least a little joy at seeing them fleshed out.

Charlie Kay.

Burning on a slow fuse

Hide In Plain Sight

Director: James Caan

The glossy sentimentality of *Kramer v. Kramer* made me apprehensive about this film, based on a true story, and dealing with the similar topic of a father fighting to hold on to his kids. To my relief, the similarity ended there, and the true-to-life quality of *Hide In Plain Sight* had me very involved throughout to the climax of the story.

The central character, Hack, who works on the line in a car factory, is a credibly naive man, who burns on a slow fuse as the film develops. His ex-wife, her lover and Hack's son and daughter are removed to another state by the US government, as part of their Witness Re-location Programme. He takes this calmly at first, believing that the authorities will put things right, once they know the facts.

As his legal attempts to recover his kids fail one by one, and he realises that the state has no intention of returning them, he gets angry. In one (for me) satisfying scene, he deliberately smashes up his opposition lawyer's brand new Corvette car, but gets no relief from this. When he is made redundant from his job (another government plot?) he takes direct action, setting off to find his children, and in the process, alienating and upsetting those who previously supported him, including his second wife, and of course his lawyer.

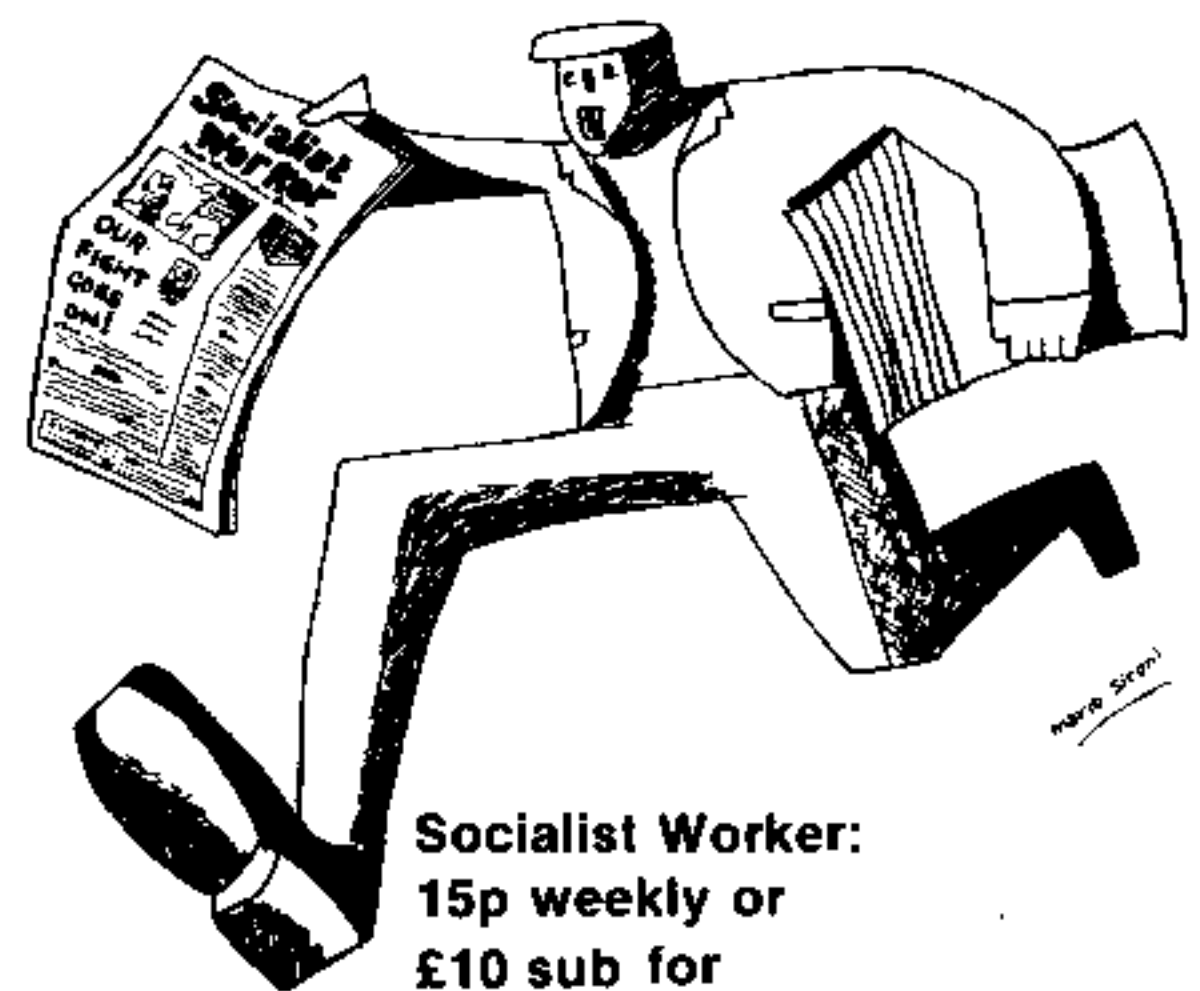
His strong determination to drop 'legal' moves, puts him in actual physical

danger, and he realises the state will let this happen, while protecting their precious witness, setting him up in a cushy job and home, while Hack risks his life, his job and his new marriage to fight them. He becomes totally cynical regarding the motives of all government agencies, lawyers, congressman, and their offers of help.

Giving up on the system was a maverick, risky course for Hack. He did not appear to have looked for support from his workmates, which was not surprising. Most people still see problems with family as 'personal', even when they have clear political and social implications. In his case, it was suggested that government agencies had powerful influence on businesses, getting people hired or fired as they liked, so it would have been more remarkable had Hack tried to get his workmates to support him. As it was, it was only by chance that he tracked down his children.

The pace of the film was rather lacking in excitement, given the nature of the background including the Mafia, government conspiracies, and courtroom dramas. The director, James Caan, has a good eye for details, such as the embarrassingly real portrayal of Hack meeting his second wife, Alisa, on a blind date, which I could hardly bear to watch. For the larger moves in time and place, I felt he was rather confusing, and I often did not know when or where scenes were supposed to be located.

See this film if you want to see how the US government's view of law and order fails at the point where they need to protect their rotten capitalist system. However, don't expect to be told how to fight this system, unless you're over six feet tall and hulky, drive a car aggressively and don't scare easily.
Denise Fenn



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O is for **overproduction** **The Capitalist** **economy brings**

In the late 1830s and 1840s the Lancashire cotton industry, pillar of Britain's world industrial supremacy, slumped. It was the first serious case of a new sort of crisis. The problem was that not too few but *too many* goods had been produced. The result of fifty years of unprecedented growth in which labour productivity increased many times over, was mass starvation with many thousands thrown out of work. Yet the cotton-worker who owned more than one pair of trousers was rare.

Competition in the industry was a cut throat affair. The price of a pound of spun cotton fell from 10s 11d in 1784 to 11¹/₄d in 1832. Profit margins were squeezed. Firms seized upon every new invention hoping to steal an advantage over their rivals. Output grew a hundred-fold. But other industries lagged far behind. Wages were barely above subsistence level. Most of the money went on food. Abroad colonial markets were saturated. On the continent new competitors were emerging, with the help of government protection against British cloth.

The very bad years were 1841-2. Wages were cut, mills closed, and workers were forced to beg for poor relief. The hand-loom weavers, working at home, with primitive equipment, struggling to escape being sucked into the mills with their appalling conditions, were finally forced out of existence. As prices fell they just couldn't keep up. The new powerlooms were showing both their true worth to their owners and their threat to the very lives of workers.

The economists of the day were shaken. Their models proved that such a crisis couldn't happen. The great Ricardo himself had said so. Preferring the models to reality,

inclined to defend capitalism rather than expose it, they grabbed at any plausible excuse. Using the language of the time, they put the blame on an ill-defined combination of bad luck, workers, foreigners and interfering politicians. Poor relief, even under the draconian provisions of the 1834 Law, was blamed for encouraging idleness. Unions, of course, were condemned out of hand for disrupting the 'free market'. Pundits deplored the refusal of workers to meekly accept wage cuts in the interests of restoring profits and promoting recovery.

The cotton-workers had other ideas. Many were involved in the Chartist campaigns for such demands as a shorter working day as well as the vote. 1842 saw a general strike throughout South Lancashire. By the end of the year the military had moved in, and 1,500 of the leaders were in prison. Few would have called themselves socialist. But they did know that the new system, with all its marvellous technology, was at fault and that drastic measures were required.

Most looked backwards. After all no such crises had occurred in the past. When workers or peasants produced mainly for themselves and their families, and not for the market, overproduction was impossible. Things were grown or made directly for use, for human need, and not according to how much money could be got for them. Crises then had been a matter of *underproduction*—the result of a bad harvest or the destruction of a war. Many Chartists wanted to return to this state of affairs. Hence the demand for every family to be given its own plot of land.

In 1842 a 22-year old German with radical

ideas, called Friedrich Engels, arrived in Manchester to work for a branch of his father's firm. He was so struck by what he saw that he wrote the most powerful and shocking indictment of early industrial capitalism of them all. Despite page after page expressing sheer horror at the slums of Manchester, the *Conditions of the Working Class in England* is full of optimism. Engels sees crudely but clearly that the problem lies not with the new technology in itself but with the system in which it was being used.

Making friends with the leaders of the 'physical force' wing of the Chartists, such as Harney, Engels saw the unions as 'schools of struggle' for a new sort of society, communism. In Germany another young radical, Karl Marx, read his book and was highly impressed. It was Marx, of course, who first systematically analysed why crises of overproduction were not accidental but the inevitable consequence of the anarchic and class-divided character of capitalism itself.

After one more severe crisis in 1847-8, capitalism recovered. It still had plenty of room to expand. The railroad boom stimulated new industries and help extend the market to new part of the globe. Yet crises of overproduction recurred at regular intervals, culminating in the worldwide slump of the 1930s. With the Second World War and the years of the postwar boom which followed, it seemed to many people that such crises were a thing of the past. Now as the world economy slides into a 'recession' more severe even than that of 1974-5, the economists are again looking bewildered, and the pundits are once more being wheeled out to bemoan the greed and idleness of the working-class.

There are many arguments among Marxists about the precise mechanisms by which crises occur. This isn't the place to go into them. But one point must be emphasised. It isn't just a matter of demand not keeping up with the expansion of output which occurs in a boom.

Behind the overproduction of goods lies what Marx called an 'overaccumulation' or overproduction of capital. Of course, if prices were to fall really low all goods could be sold. But that wouldn't be profitable and there lies the rub. That's why raising wages won't help, as that too hurts profits. Increased investment which throws more steel, cars or whatever onto the market only makes matters worse. Boosting arms spending which doesn't have that effect was a way out, at least for a while, during and after the Second World War. But what a solution!

Too many cars have been made. Yet half the families in this country don't have one. Too much steel has been produced. Meanwhile peasants in much of the world lack the simplest tools. Wheat is burnt in the USA as people starve. Readers can add to the list for themselves. A system which shores itself up by producing the means for our annihilation must itself be destroyed.

Pete Green